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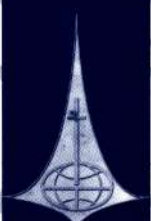


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Between Vision and Reality: Lutheran Churches in Transition



The Lutheran World Federation

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Preface

Ishmael Noko

Over the past decade *communio* has become increasingly central to the theological self-understanding of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). In a three-year study the Department for Theology and Studies explored the crucial question of what this might actually imply and how the churches engage together in God's mission. The findings of this study are published in this book.

We are most grateful to the member churches who sent representatives to the regional consultations, and especially to the international core group of theologians who accompanied the whole study process and provided insightful, cross-cultural theological reflections.

What is presented here are glimpses into the Lutheran churches; much more could be added. We would like to encourage the reader to reflect on how the churches presented themselves and how they are perceived and interpreted by those from outside their own context. All churches are in transition, facing challenges both distinctive and similar to one another. What can we learn from one another? How can we deepen our sense of what it means to be a communion in society, as a part of the whole *communio* of God?

Communion, Community, Society

Introducing a Global Study of the Lutheran World Federation

Wolfgang Greive

This collection of essays is the result of a three-year study program on "Communion, Community, Society" (1997–2000), initiated and carried out by the Lutheran World Federation's desk for Theology and the Church in cooperation with a number of LWF member churches. In an attempt to ascertain how the church as a communion understands itself in today's society, this study process has probed for a realistic sense of what ecclesiology means and how it is lived out in different contexts. An international team of theologians accompanying this project—the core group—participated in five regional meetings, at which the Lutheran churches presented themselves. Their findings are contained in this publication.

Over the last few decades dramatic changes have affected the Lutheran churches worldwide.

- The Cold War has ended and with it the clear lines of separation and classification.
- Former ideologies have faded and new ideologies are emerging due to globalization. Today's global economy has enormous social and political implications and with changes in communication has led to a globalized culture.
- This globalization has provoked localization. The many faces of globalization imply the many faces of religion and culture, with the danger of falling into new fundamentalism.

These transformations beg basic questions such as: What is our identity? How are we to survive? Where are we going? What holds society together? What is our role in the new power structures? These fundamental questions challenge theology and the church and call us to reflect anew on how the gospel addresses people today. This task is not an easy one. While in many contexts religion is no longer accepted as the unquestioned imparting of culture and meaning of life, new forms of religion have considerable appeal. The churches must find their significance and concrete goals in very different situations. Are they relevant as communions of faith? What is the future of Lutheran churches as communions in a changing world? Basic questions such as these were explored in this study program.

A Study in Process: From India to Sweden

The book contains essays, excerpts, findings, and theological assessments from consultations held in five regions: Asian churches in Chennai, India (March 1998); African churches in Moshi, Tanzania (August 1998); Latin American churches in São Leopoldo, Brazil (April 1999); North American churches in Chicago, USA (September 1999); and European churches in Höör near Lund, Sweden (May 2000).

The meetings began in Asia, shortly after the 50th Anniversary Assembly of the LWF which, for the first time, had been held in Asia. In Asia Christians are very much in the minority, but their presence is appreciated as a sign of hope. "The church has become 'a school' which attracts people to learn, 'a hospital' which heals people and 'a faith community' in which love is shared, trust is shared, and confidence for life is gained."¹ The reality of India confronted especially the European core group members with a starkly different context. What does it mean to be church in this context?

Sweden was chosen as the final venue because of the significant change in 2000 of the church's relation to the state. Moreover, this meeting was held near Lund, where the first assembly of the LWF gathered in 1947. That assembly's theme—"The Lutheran Church in the World Today"—was echoed in the title of this study program.

On the way from Asia to Europe the core group traveled to Africa and the Americas where Lutheran churches struggle to be indigenous to their contexts. What is the difference between being a Tanzanian Lutheran church and a Lutheran church in Tanzania, or a Brazilian Lutheran church and a Lutheran church in Brazil? Is the American Lutheran church an Evangelical Lutheran Church in America? Moving beyond the bounds of ethnicity is decisive for a true understanding of the church as communion in society. The vision of *communio* calls into question ethnic, class and nation-orientated understandings of the church.

Communion as a Keyword

What is the reason for stressing the idea of communion? Communion is one of the keywords in today's theological and ecumenical, societal and political reflections. It is a focus in discussions in theology and the social sciences since societies are forced to deal with basic questions of orientation in view of the loss of traditional community—on all continents—and the emergence of various new types of communities. While much of this loss of traditional

¹ Chen Xi-da, "Life and Witness of the Church in China," in *In Christ – Called to Witness, Official Report of the Ninth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation* (Geneva: LWF, 1997), p. 152.

community has been caused by the forces of globalization, the dialectic between globalization and localization has brought about new communities. New local community movements, new forms of counseling and assistance are in tension "with the systematic rationality of modern socialization that spans money, law and power and at the same time is becoming atomized."² The understanding of communion and community needs to be examined in the light of this reality.

Communitarian thinking recognizes *inter alia* that in order to live together it is indispensable that people engage socially and subscribe to some basic values. It critiques the individualistic, utilitarian, and rationalistic way of life which it claims undermines the very foundation of society. There is no way of returning to an era before modern societies, before the possibilities of an individualistic and rationalistic way of life. In Europe and the USA, family is increasingly seen as instrumental to other means, such as career advancement. In Africa the disintegration of the extended family has resulted in more unattached individuals and nuclear families. "But what then is the point of attempts to mediate between community and society under today's conditions?"³ Modern societies must clearly define the conditions for their existence. What is the function of communities within the rationality of social systems? What kinds of communions are relevant today? How can communion be a cultural project today? If the renewal of community results in increased modernity then we need a differentiated understanding of modernity.

While the churches as communions are challenged by these questions, trying to find answers involves more than theology. Concentrating on ecclesiological and ecumenical questions and proclaiming the relevance of the church and its message, the church often fails to develop a wider understanding of social life in religious and secular terms. A social self-understanding of the church as a communion within society must take into account theological and nontheological elements. If church is defined merely in dogmatic terms then it becomes a strange institution and idealistic communion. Its power lies in symbols about God and God's purpose with the world, but it has no real impact on social life if it fails to relate to cultural and social realities. Church is not a closed system but, rather, an integral part of the contemporary, functionally differentiated society that varies widely from one context to another. Theology therefore must examine how the church is integrated into society and how, as a specific communion within the secular community of communities, it has a bearing on the world.

² Eckhart Pankoke, "Community and Solidarity in Modern Society: Some Sociological Viewpoints," in Wolfgang Greive (ed.), *Communion Community Society, LWF Studies 1/1998* (Geneva: LWF, 1998), p. 114.

³ Peter-Ulrich Merz-Benz, "The Basic Problem: Mediation Between Community and Society," in *ibid.*, p. 125.

When we refer to the LWF as a communion of churches we are not speaking exclusively about communion, but, rather, about "communion, community, society." Since we want to understand communion in relation to modern society our emphasis has to be on community. The church must be fully aware of the preconditions for and expressions of its existence, while stressing the relevance of Jesus Christ's existence. What type of community is the church? How does the church mediate its vision of communion, its *communio* in society? What role does the contemporary church play in society? How does it understand itself? What is its profile? How can we apply to society's problems the understanding of the church as communion in Christ, rather than merely a communion in common interests and joint action? We have to deal with ecclesiological, ethical and societal questions.

Communion as a Lutheran Concept

At the center of the Reformation theology of communion are the believers who meet and understand their life in the light of the gospel, worshiping together and serving the neighbor. "... this communion is an unconditional gift, but it also involves the unconditional commission to care for others."⁴ This understanding of Holy Communion "is based on the Reformation's renewal of the biblical term 'holy': The Holy Spirit calls the *communio*, creates faith through it, fortifies it and lets it bear fruit."⁵ *Communio* in Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit is both reality and task, gift and calling. The point is that love flowing from faith becomes effective in the world. *Communio* has significant ethical implications and, therefore, Luther criticized the practices of the religious brotherhoods, which destroyed by selfish love "true brotherhood which is established in the holy sacrament." True brotherhood serves the poor and needy.

If men desire to maintain a brotherhood, they should gather provisions and feed and serve a tableful or two of poor people, for the sake of God. [...] Or they should gather the money...and collect it into a common treasury, each craft for itself. Then in cases of hardship, needy fellow workmen might be helped to get started, and be lent money, or a young couple of the same craft might be fitted out respectably from this common treasury.⁶

Therefore Martin Luther and Johannes Bugenhagen prepared church orders and structures of community life in which one essential element is a common chest which could serve the needs of the poor.

⁴ Christoph Schwöbel, "The Quest for Communion. Reasons, Reflections and Recommendations," in Heinrich Holze (ed.), *The Church as Communion, LWF Documentation 42/1997* (Geneva: LWF, 1997), p. 259.

⁵ Rolf Schäfer, "Communion in Lutheran Ecclesiology," in *ibid.*, p. 138.

⁶ "The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ and the Brotherhoods," in E. Theodore Bachmann and Helmut T. Lehmann (eds.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 35 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), pp. 68f.

The Lutheran understanding that love serves the true communion has often been neglected with the consequence that communion has seldom been a leading concept in Lutheran dogmatics. The way in which you ask determines what you will discover. Communion needs a strong understanding. It is based on the faith that we receive unconditionally in the Lord's Supper. It is this wonderful reality of being in communion in Christ, the communion of forgiveness, that inspires Christian life. If this communion is real then this is sufficient. We are liberated to act in this world guided by the vision of *communio*. This implies being transformed into a communion of love which transcends differences of gender, class, race, nation, and culture. Hope is in Christ. The eschatological dimension shapes the entire understanding of communion, founded in the understanding of God's love in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit (God is trinitarian). Therefore the reality of communion in Christ must be distinguished from the vision of the way in which this communion is lived out in church and society. This means that a multi-dimensional understanding of communion is necessary, which derives from faith, love and hope, a trinitarian thinking. Theology must not be reduced to an hierarchical christological order: God—Christ—church government or Pope—pastors or priests—lay people. Such theology is pneumatologically deficient.

A multi-dimensional understanding is reflected in the message of 1990 Assembly of the LWF in Curitiba:

Our understanding of communion begins with the biblical teaching that we are united in Christ and therefore in fellowship with each other. Life in communion implies practical attitudes and actions. It means mutual acceptance of each other, sharing concern for the physical and spiritual well-being of each other in all aspects of life. It means that differences of sex, age, race, nation, culture and social position are transcended by our unity in Christ.⁷

In their ecumenical endeavors since the 1984 Assembly in Budapest, Lutheran churches have paid increasing attention to the significance of the church as communion, and ecumenical Lutheranism has pointed to the ethical implications of the understanding of justification by grace through Christ by faith alone. The community of faith "exists not for its own sake nor merely for more efficiency; it exists for mission and service in the world."⁸ The Curitiba Assembly in particular underlined the concept of *communio* and the relationship to the world. Never before was the theme of an assembly, "I Have Heard the Cry of My People," so concrete and touching, nor the Lutheran concept of communion so strongly emphasized with its social implications.

⁷ *I have Heard the Cry of My People, Official Proceedings Eighth Assembly, LWF Report 28/29* (Geneva: LWF, 1990), p. 81.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

Nevertheless, the interpretation of communion as reality and task has been subject to some misunderstandings and lack of clarity.⁹ It is not always clear that social engagement, the acts of love, are the practical implementation of communion. Social engagement is neither a prerequisite of nor a precondition for communion. From a Lutheran perspective everything depends on the deep understanding of communion as a gift. We are in communion in Christ, and there is no more real or fuller communion through our deeds. Neither church structure nor social service is a condition for a fuller communion. They do not make communion a success. This religious perspective contains the power to address the problem of people's living together without illusion or desperation and to maintain human dignity in its social reality. At the heart of human existence is the right to be. This experience implies the unconditioned experience of community.

The program "communion, community, society" pursued the theological intentions of the 1997 Assembly in Hong Kong,

As God has given us the gift of reconciliation and communion, it is our task to live out the meaning of this communion in our life with each other.¹⁰

Communion is not something we achieve, it is a gift of God. This truth empowers us to the task of communion.¹¹

We are called to be a living and a witnessing community in societies. Christian communities, called to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth,

are empowered to be witnessing, inclusive, tolerant, serving and caring, reconciling and inspired by the self-giving love of Christ, gathering regularly around Christ and in the Holy Spirit to receive the love of God and be enabled to bring it to the world.¹²

Our witness to Christ cannot be separated from service to the world, stewardship of creation, and advocacy for all who suffer abuses of body, mind, soul, and spirit.¹³

When interpreting the Lutheran heritage in the light of the Bible as well as the problems and challenges facing the world today, it becomes clear that there is no inherent conflict between justification and justice, spiritual and social community, service in the church and service in the world. "The church's calling is both to bear witness to the gospel and to serve others, and to participate in the coming of peace and justice."¹⁴ However, "Lutheranism is par-

⁹ cf. Heinrich Holze, "Communion, an Ethical Challenge? A Few Historical remarks on the Discussion in the Lutheran World Federation since 1977," in *op. cit.*, (note 4), pp. 216ff.

¹⁰ *Op. cit.*, (note 1), p. 82.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 48.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

¹⁴ Elisabeth Parmentier, "Theology in the Communion of Churches: What are the Implications?," in Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro (ed.), *In Search of a Round Table. Gender, Theology & Church Leadership* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997), p. 118.

ticularly sensitive to the temptation to put the believer's work before faith. Love cannot replace faith but it is the result of faith."¹⁵

The Core Group and the Main Questions

Reflecting the intercultural character of this project, eight theologians from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and North America were nominated as members of the core group accompanying the entire project. It was their task to compare the different regional meetings and analyze the findings. This intercultural Lutheran approach resulted in a plural interpretation with different emphases on the understanding of the church as communion in society. Instead of a monolithic interpretation the door was opened for new and complex insights. This corresponds to the understanding of theology in the LWF.¹⁶

The relevance question that was at the heart of this study presupposes the "dogmatic study" *The Church as Communion. Lutheran Contributions to Ecclesiology*, edited by Heinrich Holze, and the interdisciplinary ecumenical study, *Communion, Community, Society. The Relevance of the Church*, edited by the author of this introduction which prepared for the study and focused the guiding questions. The questions were worked out by the core group at its first meeting in October 1997 in Geneva.

The core group sought concrete understandings of how the theological concept of communion is and can be relevant to the problems in societies today. Subsequently it focused on the following main questions:

- How does the church understand itself in its context? (Church in context)
- How does the church deal with the main social issues, conflicts and dynamics in its contexts? (Social issues)
- Questions for theological reflection (Theological mediation)

These issues were unfolded in several questions which are included at the end of this publication. It was left up to the churches to set their own emphases. In response, very different profiles emerged. For example, the European churches tended to concentrate on the first main question (church in context) whereas the Asian churches tended to focus on the second main question (social issues). The questions for theological reflection were dealt with primarily by the core group.

The theological mediation is based on the churches' responses, and analyzes the presuppositions underlying the descriptions, assessments, and sug-

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Ten Theses on the Role of Theology in the LWF which are included at the end of this publication.

gestions. It was the core group's task to build bridges between practice and theory, church and theology, contents and contexts, and to give some orientation while also provoking thoughtful reflection and critique.

The Purpose of this Book

This book is an invitation to continue a process that was begun at the regional consultations: to deepen theological reflections on the church as a communion in society. It is representative of the study process but not a complete documentation of the richness of all that was experienced in the form of presentations, discussions, community visits, worship services and cultural events. The essays and texts from the five regions were carefully selected and are representative of what the core group saw and heard in the different regions. A few essays were written after the conclusion of the study project, as were the summary of challenges and proposals formulated by the core group at its last meeting in Geneva, in December 2000.

It is hoped that with its findings this publication contributes to strengthening the awareness of the church's social reality; strengthening the self-understanding of the churches in their specific contexts; learning from one another within the communion; clarifying the guiding ideas of the churches' work; and providing a relevant eschatological vision of the church.

Programs are People

The study program was well received by the member churches which nominated their representatives and supported the program. Many people were involved: lay members, church leaders, professional theologians, academics, as well as representatives from the LWF departments for World Service and for Mission and Development.

I would like to thank all those involved in this study, especially the core group, a very engaged team of theologians, a lively intercultural communion for the sake of the communion of churches in different parts of the world. We believe "that there are ways of overcoming the difficulties in intercultural communication"¹⁷ as well as ways of overcoming an abstract, utopian understanding of *communio*.

The core group: Karen L. Bloomquist, Guillermo Hansen, Dietz Lange, Monica J. Melanchthon, Israel Peter Mwakyolile, Joachim Track, Vitor Westhelle, Else Marie Wiberg Pedersen, Iris J. Benesch and Wolfgang Greive.

¹⁷ Isabelle J. Cecilia, "Intercultural Communication: A Differentiated Approach to Cultural Diversity," in *op. cit.*, (note 4), p. 220.

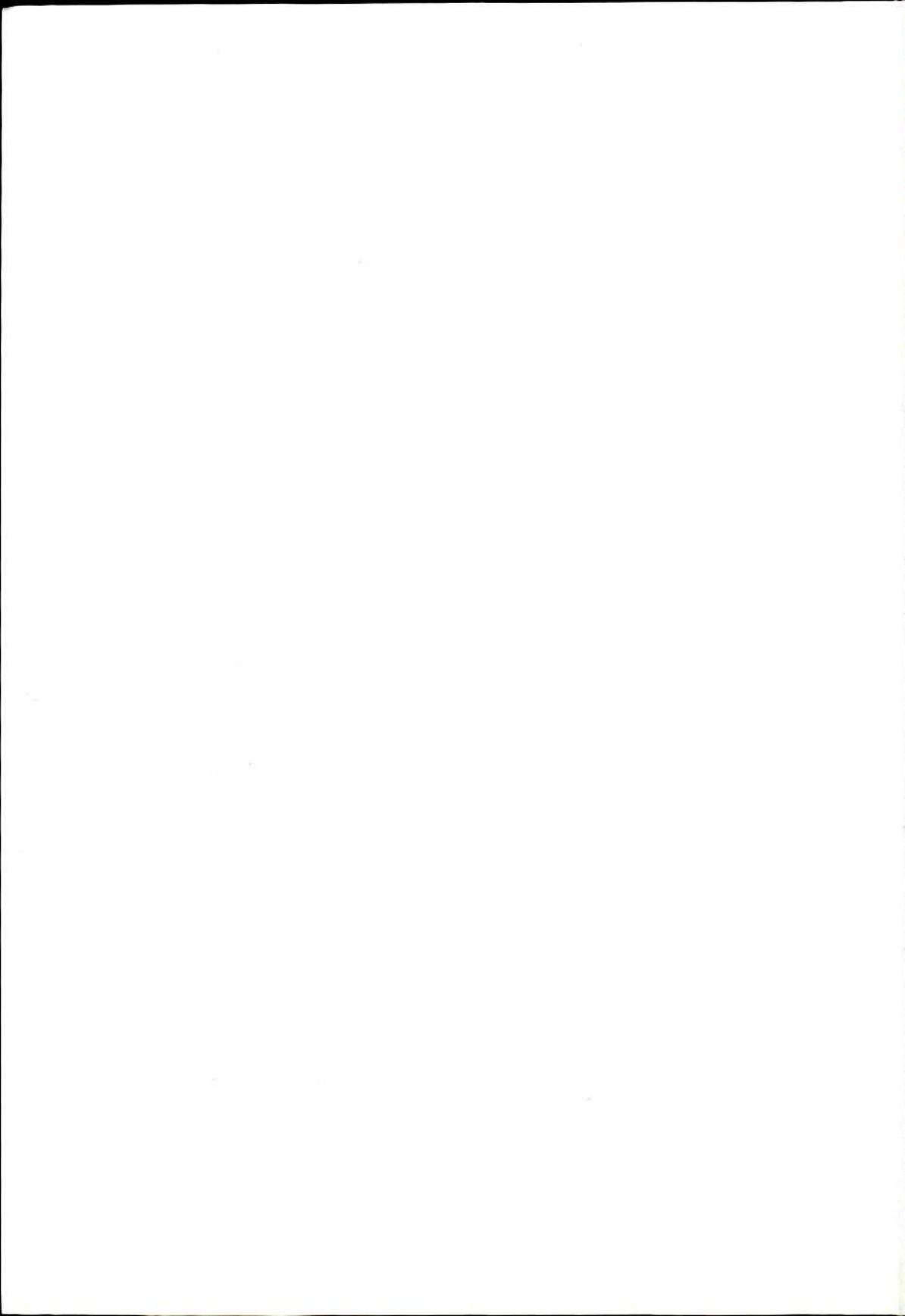
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Fourth regional consultation: Catherine Braasch, Claudine Carlson, Inez Torres Davis, Ronald Duty, Pablo Espinoza, John Kretzmann, Sandra La Blanc, Arthur Lechnitz, James Y. K. Moy, Joanne Negstad, Albert Pero, Jr., John Lynner Peterson, Steven Robertson, Muriel Schauer, David Scott, Angela L. Shannon, Lee E. Snook, Mary Solberg, Walter M. Stuhr, Nelvin Vos, Gilson Waldkoenig, James P. Wind.

Fifth regional consultation : Kajsa Ahlstrand, Christina Berglund, Richard Fischer, Hans Gammeltoft-Hansen, András Korányi, Mikael Ljungström, Christoph Münchow, Günther Overlach, Tiit Pädam, Martin Svensson, Anton Tikhomirov, Igor Tomo, Aud V. Tonnessen, Hans-Michael Uhl, Olof Wärneryd, Annika Wirén.



Lutheran Churches in Transition: Summary of Challenges and Proposals¹

I. Preamble

We bring to your attention the summary results of a three-year study program on Lutheran ecclesiology, entitled *Comunion, Community, Society* (CCS), conducted on a worldwide basis. We had consultations in all regions of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF)—allowing us first hand experience of some representative local churches—involving participants from the region drawn from the following categories: lay members; church leaders, professional theologians, and other academicians. A core group representing the different regions of the LWF developed and accompanied this program throughout the regions.

The methodological approach adopted brought together the diversity represented in the communion and proceeded intentionally to seek a theological integration of the local experiences of ecclesial practices with the biblical and confessional heritage. As guidelines for this study, as the original title (CCS) suggests, we pursued three lines of inquiry; a) the relationship of the church to its social, political, economic and cultural setting; b) the impact of the context in the ecclesial formation; c) and the emergent ecclesiological and theological models which were sometimes more and sometimes less explicitly articulated.

All Lutheran churches today are, in one way or another, in a stage of transition. The breakdown of the East-West polarization, the rapid process of economic globalization, the growing disparities of wealth not only in terms of the division between North and South but also within each single country itself, the spread of new media communication, huge demographic shifts—all of these factors are accelerating and intensifying ongoing processes of secularization and interreligious strife as well as presenting the churches with new kinds of challenges. These changes are of such awesome dimensions that they require more than readjustments in such fields as organizational structures, *diaconia*, or worship. Indeed, they demand no less than a renewed reflection on the more basic question of the church's very identity.

¹ This document was formulated by the core group: Karen L. Bloomquist, Wolfgang Greive, Guillermo Hansen, Dietz Lange, Monica Melanchthon, Israel Peter Mwakylile, Joachim Track, Else Marie Wiberg Pedersen, and Vitor Westhelle, in December 2000.

In an effort to face these multiple problems and issues an initial rediscovery of the wealth of the biblical and specifically Lutheran traditions can be discerned. This is evident in three areas primarily:

- The increasing awareness of the need for restructuring even in the more traditional churches on both the local and the national levels;
- the increasingly international character of theological work in many parts of the world;
- the widespread consensus on the need for the church to participate actively in the construction of a more just and equitable society, by means of *diaconia* and public pronouncements.

Nonetheless, some serious shortcomings can be observed. In general, a lack of eschatological awareness is apparent in many regions. There were numerous instances of ecumenical dialogue and cooperation on the congregational level and between church leaders. Yet an understanding of and even interest in what ecumenicity means, both in terms of commonalties and differing profiles, was deficient almost everywhere. In the countries of the Southern hemisphere, the inevitable financial dependence on the donor countries is often not balanced by encouraging the development of indigenous resources, talents and strategies. In some areas of Africa, tribalism is of detrimental divisiveness. In many of the rich countries of the North, links to the state and to ethnicity are still far too strong, and racism and xenophobia are forming serious obstacles to the church's mission. The national and regional limitations of theology in Germany and parts of Africa, and church structures largely analogous to those of the state in parts of Europe are cases in point.

The church's struggle for identity is faced with several major tensions that are intertwined and interrelated: inclusiveness versus tribal, racial, and ethnic exclusiveness; unity of faith in Christ versus ecclesial and cultural plurality; openness to the world versus a mentality of self-sufficiency; the basic belief of being saved by grace alone versus church efforts at self-justification by efficiency, growth, and prosperity. In sum, the Lutheran church is caught in, and struggling with, many new forms of the perennial tension between its confession and its contextuality.

Lutheranism, originally stemming from one single culture, has branched out and developed into a multicultural scenario, which stays together as a communion because of the Reformation heritage it holds. This multicultural context entails ethnic and national identities, which significantly shape the particular ecclesiological understandings of Lutheran churches in the different contexts. Ethnicity and nationality as sociological realities deeply affect our theological and ecclesiological formation and understandings, and in turn, our relation to others and our service to the world.

II. Theses on Communion, Community, Society

1. Marks of the Church

Lutherans recognize that the church is a *communio* in society and as such placed in the world, although not identical with the world. In order to differentiate the church from the world, the Reformation set up marks or *notae* to point to where in the world this church as a *communio* could be identified. Today, however, the *notae ecclesiae* of the Lutheran churches have often become an immediate reflection of the ideals of their socio-cultural context. There is a tendency to leave the qualifying common notes in keeping with our Reformation heritage, and to set up quantifying common-place notes. The challenging task for the Lutheran churches worldwide is that of simultaneously keeping and transforming contextually the confessional *notae* in order to maintain a necessary tension between the hidden and the manifest church, the identity and the contextuality of the church.

2. Catholicity

Catholicity, as the external basis of *communio* challenges particularistic interpretations disguised under the cloak of universality. In the Lutheran communion of churches a growing sense of catholicity encourages a commitment to live out its identity in critical confrontation with local and global frontiers. From such places grows a sense of being witness of the gospel *for* the whole world even if not yet *of* the whole world. As symbols need embodiment, a catholic communion will seek to express itself through an organizational strategy communicating and relating churches and their witness in a globalized world.

3. Eschatology

Three main eschatological visions can be recognized within the Lutheran communion. One is of a transcendental type, another is historical and developmental, and a third one is topological and contextual. While the first can be found everywhere with different variations, the second has predominated in the Northern hemisphere and the third one is the new impulse coming from the South. In spite of the differences in emphases in the entire communion the relationship of the church to the kingdom is one of discontinuity rather than continuity (the dominant model in the Roman Catholic Church). The discontinuity emphasis places any eschatological vision in the true light of seeing the church at the service of the kingdom and calls for the deepening of the biblical foundations, the confessional interpretations, and the contextual relevance of each of the eschatological visions.

4. Spirituality

In the Lutheran communion there is a renewed awareness of the centrality of worship in the Christian faith. The church of the Word is rediscovering the

relevance of signs, symbols, and rites. Worldwide, spiritual experiences are being sought and new forms of spiritual exercises are being developed in reference to one's own tradition and in conversation with other confessions and religions. This new sensitivity for an existential spirituality and an appreciation of the richness of religious experiences and expressions conveys God's promise as long as it is kept in relation to its foundation. This provides the grounds for a reconciled and reconciling spirituality. Christian piety in particular lives from the given and liberating presence of God and is moved toward reconciliation within the community of believers and also in the midst of the world.

5. Mission and *Communio*

In the discussion about the self-understanding and the restructuring of the Lutheran churches in society five new ecclesiological models can be identified: We can see the church as a new attractive folk church; an efficient player in the market; a movement, an alternative community; a relevant prophetic voice; or a vehicle for mission. Today all these models are linked to the mission task but they often lack a biblically grounded vision such as *communio*. This vision is sometimes interpreted in a one-sided way, misunderstood, confused, or even absent. The lack of a deeper theological understanding of communion can lead to major tensions in the church's struggle for identity and certain shortcomings, such as churches whose main identity is still defined in ethnic and national terms or whose mission is spiritually or socially orientated. Without the vision of *communio*, the approach to mission is too narrow.

6. Institution

The institutional setup of Lutheran churches in various regions of the world ranges from loosely organized network-like movements to rigid, hierarchical and bureaucratic structures, reflecting both their own history and their present social environments. This is due to the fact that according to Lutheran conviction, the task of organizing the church is left to the rational mediation of the priesthood of all believers as it is founded on the equality before Christ with the exigencies of social reality. Aiming at more participatory structures, churches, in the discipleship of the Cross, will not succumb to either resignation to the *status quo* or, the dictates of consumer-oriented expediencies.

7. Justice

Most of the churches would affirm that working for justice is part of their calling, but how central this is, what it means, and how it is lived out varies significantly. What justice *is* grows out of the concrete, lived experiences of injustice in particular contexts, which have their own histories and call for their own forms of address. Important variables include (a) whether a church

is composed of, or at least conscious of being surrounded by those who experience obvious injustices; (b) whether the expressed injustices are rooted primarily in cultural, economic, or political factors; (c) whether the church is in the majority or minority *vis-à-vis* other churches or religions in its setting, and in relation to the established powers; (d) whether the focus is primarily on injustices within the church or within the wider society; (e) whether justice commitments are explicitly reflected in how the church is structured or how it carries out its mission, and (f) how consciously it is related to those in the wider communion.

8. *Diaconia*

The Lutheran Confessions do not insist on *diaconia* as a central mark of the church. However, *diaconia*, including prophetic ministry and participation in the struggles for the empowerment and humanization of society and culture, is becoming a central focus and identifying feature of the church today. For *diaconia* to be carried out with integrity the churches need to explore further the matter of economic dependency, structures and relationships, and promote partnership and equality in cultural, economic, political, and educational areas, and deepen its theological foundations.

III. Agenda

With these challenges and proposals we commend the whole study to:

The member churches of the LWF: The results of this study are themselves an expression of the communion of the LWF, based on encountering the church in different regions. There may be surprises in how your church presented itself and how it is perceived by those from outside your context. Churches in quite different settings face some common questions and challenges, such as in how *diaconical* efforts are related to the core of the church. It is hoped that results of this study will stimulate further consideration of these themes within your church, in relation to its self-understanding and the challenges it faces. Attention needs to be given to what each member church can learn from churches in other contexts, giving and receiving in relation to their respective strengths and weaknesses, as part of one communion. Such dialogue and reflections will also be important as member churches prepare for the 2003 gathering of the communion, the Tenth LWF Assembly in Winnipeg, Canada.

Theological institutions: The perspectives of the core group of theologians from around the world were enriched and expanded significantly through their participation in this study process. It is hoped that such methodological approaches that begin with the experience and self-understandings of churches might refocus and deepen work on important theological questions. The theological interpretations offered here are first steps that need to be probed and

expanded further. Theological institutions are invited to continue this process.

The LWF secretariat: The LWF needs to encourage and support networking between theological institutions and churches in different global contexts as they consider these theological questions, and explore more opportunities for this kind of theological work to be pursued in a variety of venues

As stated in one of the Ten Theses on the Role of Theology in the LWF (1995, Program Committee for Theology and Studies): "the LWF offers itself as a place for different articulations of diverse experiences; b) as a catalyst for innovation within theologies in different contexts; and c) as a guarantor of both the diversity and of the necessity of expressing commonalities." It is hoped that the results of this study will deepen considerations of how best to reflect and serve a communion of churches that reflects these emerging ecclesiological profiles.

Asia

An Indian Experience: The Struggle for Survival

Wolfgang Greive

Coming to India as a Lutheran can be compared to a tiny stone being dropped into an enormous anthill. Among the never-ending stream of people and traffic the visitor is but the tiniest, inconspicuous detail. The Lutheran churches are such a detail, as are the South Indian Christians who constitute a mere three percent of the population.

Nevertheless, the fact that the Lutheran churches are a minority does not mean that they are self-conscious. On the contrary, our Lutheran partners are self-confident and active, although not unscathed by recent attacks against Christians and other minorities. During our stay in Chennai in March 1998, we heard about attacks on preachers and the burning of Bibles. Yet, at the time, the Christian congregations were not yet ready to react to this and there had been no public discussion on this issue. The new National People's Party, the BJP (Bharatya Janata Party), which advocates Hindu rule, is regarded with considerable apprehension. I am told about certain Christian groups such as the North American preachers of the "Impact World Tour" notable for their aggressive missionary tactics and unashamedly Western style of proclaiming the gospel.

In light of these developments the intensive dialogue between various smaller and larger religions is remarkable, as is the joint celebration of festivals in Kanyakumari on the southern tip of India. Here we find a multireligious community where Hindus, Muslims, and Christians coexist peacefully next to fundamentalism and the "battle of the religions."

Religion permeates India. Temples and devoted believers are to be found everywhere. There is no vehicle, shop, or house that does not sport a religious icon. Hinduism which does not have a congregational structure pervades daily life. Distinctive marks of the Christian community are its Sunday worship services, its church buildings, and its visible center.

Prior to the Asian regional consultation I traveled by train through southern India. We were quite safe, my suitcase, my rucksack, and I. Despite the general hustle and bustle; the at-times unfamiliar odors; having to fight for my seat; and being harassed by beggars, the blind and the infirm, there was always a friendly face in the crowd and I had time to look out of the window. There were spectacular views of majestic, seemingly totally deserted, land-

scapes and, suddenly, a glimpse of people scurrying back and forth. The train was delayed by six hours. Night had fallen, the moon was shining brightly. I watched the shimmers of light glimmering in the distance. When the train stopped again the person sitting opposite me said, "One train late, all trains late."

When I finally reached my destination, Kanyakumari, I felt a pleasant breeze. The train was virtually empty now and for the first time I was almost alone. Is this part of the magic of the southern tip of India?

India, the serene country of meditation, silence, and nonviolence, is no more than a cliché. India is never silent. Cars honk their horns all night long and religious communities compete with one another as to which one can transmit its service the loudest. The competition can begin at 5 a.m. on Sunday. In the evening I notice the lit-up red crosses of the Christian churches in the residential districts. I make my way among emaciated cows, screeching buses, lorries, motorbikes, and every type of vehicle conceivable. With the exception of the ambling holy cows, all are competing for a bit of the road. They are subject to the law of the fittest, the strongest, the most nimble and resourceful.

The struggle for survival is decisive for the church. The church's existence in India and in Asia at large can be likened to the person with disabilities I saw who, on a contraption reminiscent of a skateboard, pushes himself through the pulsating traffic of Chennai's streets. While a part of the system, it has the strength and courage to defend a different point of view. What is at stake are survival and real community. The fact that the church exists as a social reality within society is barely reflected upon. There is no critical reflection on the life of the church, its power structures and image in society.

Church members witness to Jesus and are actively engaged in social projects. *Diaconia* and social engagement distinguish the Lutheran churches in India, and in many parts of Asia. In other words, proclamation and social engagement go hand in hand. The stated goal is to "build a true church and a just society," but the social reality of the church itself is broken. Corruption and mismanagement of resources are part of the church.

I am struck by the decisiveness and self-awareness that underlies the presentations at the consultation on what it means to be a communion in society—whether in India, Indonesia, Taiwan, Malaysia, or Hong Kong. There is often a marked criticism of the church hierarchy and the gap between church leadership and congregation: Christianity vs. "churchianity."

As we were led through the slums to learn to see with the eyes of the poor, we were captured by the spirit, engagement, and self-confidence of the women. I sensed the spirit of the gospel that became flesh which cannot be confined within the churches.

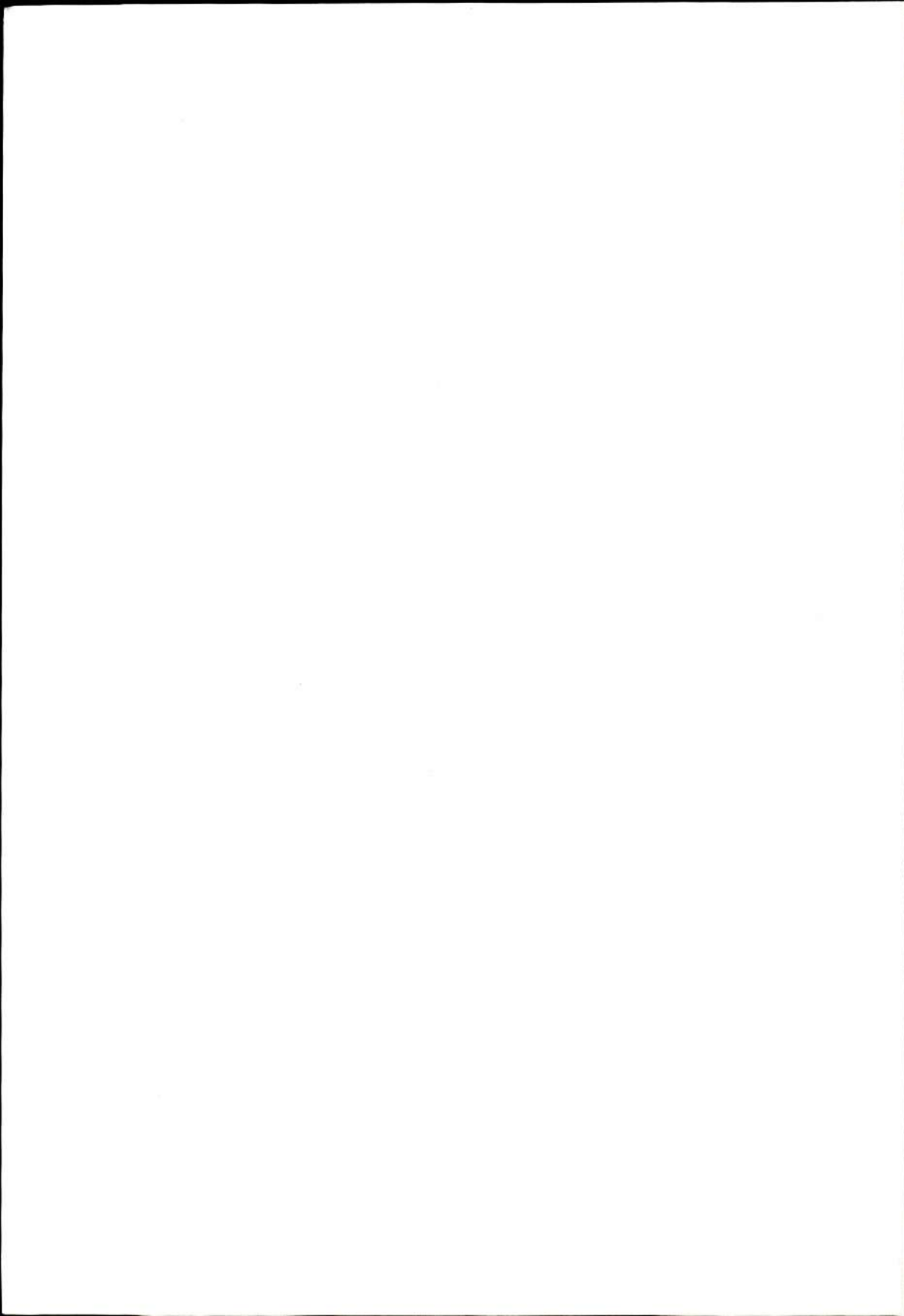
Does the church reconcile within itself the extreme contradictions and inequalities that pervade Indian society? Whereas on the one hand the church

has the appearance of a caste, it claims on the other to fight for justice and be an advocate of the Dalits, the outcastes. The Lutherans we met at Chennai believe that living out communion means addressing the issue of caste as well as those of gender and economic exploitation. Some of the participants said that the present lethargy of the Indian churches towards such matters threatens true *koinonia*.

The delicate issue of caste is indeed at the very core of Indian society. At the United Theological College in Bangalore I was told about Guru Harshananda who, while rejecting the caste system as a limiting social pyramid, affirms it as a social hierarchy. He justifies this with the argument that people need their firm place in society and directs his critique against the perversions of the caste system. Lutheran theologians at the Lutheran Theological College at Gurukul regard it as a symbol of evil, especially in the lives of the Dalits. It divides people into pure and impure, superior and inferior. "Dalit theology" stands in stark contrast to and conflict with the very deep cultural roots of the Indian caste concept. The necessary indigenization in Indian and Asian soil deeply challenges the Christian faith and *communio* theology.

In Robin Boy's book, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, we read at the very beginning that "Indian theology has not yet emerged." Since a thorough and inspired ecumenical commentary on the gospel of John can only come from Indian theology our hope turns to the Indian contribution. John's mysticism goes deeper than the Christian's morality. I only rarely encountered a mystical ecclesiology in Indian Lutheran theologians, their worship services, and projects. Instead I found a loving devotion to Jesus' lived spirituality. Bishop Johnson put it this way: "Any ecclesiology that does not help to strengthen the faith of the congregations and to liberate people from poverty is not needed."

Representatives of Lutheran churches from India, Malaysia, Indonesia, Taiwan, and Hong Kong clearly insist on a real and efficient ecclesiology. The multicolored Asian context with its everyday religious icons appears to be shattered by the vision of a church that turns to individuals in their struggle to survive with the promise of a new community.



The Credibility of the Church

Kunchala Rajaratnam

Over the past few decades the Christian church has made rather valiant attempts to relate Christ to society by reaffirming that Christ is the light or hope of the world. This reaffirmation has been needed because the church, in terms of its theology and mission, had withdrawn from the world.

The church has acted like a hunter, albeit a non-lethal one—strategizing to locate targets, isolating “victims” in a safe place, and nursing them as a “new” creation, holier and loftier than the world from which they have been withdrawn, thus distorting the message and personality of Jesus Christ.

Yet another distortion has taken place. The church is split asunder under different banners all claiming the truth, whether complete or partial. Adding to this confusion, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), by a change of its constitution, has decreed that all member churches—more than one hundred of them, embracing the vast expanse of the world—constitute a “communion.” There are strong undercurrents that question the LWF position. The pessimism stems from age-old divisive factors: race and wealth. These two factors divide not only the church, or the communion, but also the world community. The world community is in a very sad state.

Christian theologians, sociologists, scientists, and activists in church and society have raised their voices and expressed their anguish. All have ventured to hope that the message of Christ—as the light of hope of the world—would usher in a new world and a new creation.

It is unfortunate that vast sections of humanity are currently trampled under the cruel wheels of the chariots of oppression and greed. The church continues to affirm the relevance of Christ to this condition of humanity. To my mind the main question ought to be: can the church, even if it redefines its functions as communion, take us one step closer to the realization of a just society? Is the church prepared to make justice-related issues part of its agenda?

Asia is quite unique in terms of its history, culture, religion, and demography. Nonetheless, the rest of the world influences its way of life. Global cultural and economic forces hold Asia in their grip. We cannot put Asia outside the global context of today's world, especially its social challenges.

This applies also to the churches. Economics are the key to inequality and oppression. Let us look at the figures. According to United Nations sources, 20 percent of the world's population enjoys 80 percent of the world's income. But 20 percent of the population must make do with just 1.5 to 2 percent out

of that remaining 20 percent of the income. That explains the half-naked, the hungry, and the homeless millions in the developing world.

Social scientists have always claimed that the poverty of 80 percent of the world's population is essential for the affluence of remaining the 20 percent. Taking advantage of this favorable factor, the affluent have used globalization as an instrument to perpetuate income disparities. Global capital is allowed to move freely to areas where cheap labor is available, ensuring high profits for the foreign investor. Production in some developing countries is exclusively geared towards export to rich countries.

The world has been turned into a paradise for the rich. Globalization has replaced political and economic colonialism and the highly detestable troops of occupation have been replaced by the slavery of debt. Enforced currency devaluation in relation to the US dollar has virtually made the owner of the dollar the owner of the goods produced in the developing world. Thanks to the exchange rate, two dollars will secure a week's provisions for a worker in Tanzania. The product of the hard labor of farm and factory is at the disposal of the owner of the dollar, almost for free. It is no longer exploitation by the foreign ruler, but it is the rule and exploitation of foreign exchange. The free market imposed on poor countries by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is the new empire.

The world is at the feet of the new empire, headed up by the UN Group of Seven (G7). At the annual meetings of the "aid clubs," under the auspices of the IMF and the World Bank, the G7 nations ensure through the market economy that in the name of aid, development, and recovery, no country is outside the scope of their hegemony. Thus they control the destinies of the peoples of the world.

For some years Asia, especially East Asia, has managed to ride the tide of the market economy. Asian countries known as the Tigers offered a convenient channel for investment and ensured phenomenal return on capital investments. Country after country in the Far East and Southeast Asia has joined the bandwagon of prosperity. In Indonesia, for instance, pressure is mounting to accept the rule of the IMF in order to remedy economic ills—despite the fact that Indonesia is convinced that the IMF recipe will lead the country to further ruin. For the G7 nations such ruin is only a short-term phenomenon, natural to the market economy. Nevertheless, in the short term, millions will suffer miserable lives, and in the long run they will be dead: that is the state of the world.

Economic power and economic instruments are used to keep the majority of the world's population poor because poverty of the majority ensures the affluence of the minority. This is true nationally as well as globally.

The system of race and wealth as perpetuated in India ensures the slavery of the vast majority. India is a perfect example of the rich in one country joining hands with the rich in other countries to exploit the poor. No wonder then that five star hotels are surrounded by shanties.

In the state of Orissa, within a project area of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in India (UELCI), we witnessed how a joint venture with a French multinational corporation led to the displacement of 14 self-sufficient and self-reliant villages, turning them into slums, and reducing hard-working people to beggary, even drunkenness and prostitution. The UELCI could do no more than marginally mitigating the suffering of the people.

The wealth of the rich causes the poverty of the poor—a worldwide game the church also plays. We theologize. International ecumenical agencies such as the Christian Council of Asia (CCA), the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the LWF write about this pathos and become known for their love and compassion with the poor. This brings me to the question regarding the credibility of the church's concern. The Christian church is far from the communion that we long for. Communion is an ideal to realize and a worthy objective to strive for. At best, it is an hypothesis.

The church faces two challenges: first, to become the communion and, secondly, to be in the world, to be part of the world, to transform the world, to lay new foundations for the kingdom of God for a new world, that is to say, to transform the world community itself into communion. God's justice and love among the people of the world, not just among Christians, is the ultimate goal of communion. Thus the church's twin challenge is to transform itself into communion in order that the communion in Christ may transform the world community into communion.

The ecumenical objective of bringing together all those who profess the name of Christ before the same altar seems somewhat limited if we compare it to the need to bring together all of humanity. The prayer that all may be one, restricted to the Christian church, will have to be extended to all nations, to all of humanity. When Jesus prayed that "they may all be one," there were no Lutherans, no Anglicans, no Methodists, nor Baptists. There were no such divisions. It clearly implies all nations. The church will have to reorient its theology and its missiology. While the church may be a communion, the aim of this communion is to extend the concern to the whole of humanity. With such a missiological objective, strongly and truly believed and articulated, the church will be a power, God's power in this world. With this commitment, the church can become a parallel United Nations.

The history of the church, either past or present, does not indicate that the church has the direction or capacity to climb these lofty heights. First, is there substance to the claim of communion? Let us take the example of India: can the Indian church become a "communion"? We have a first-century church. Until Ziegenbald, a German Lutheran missionary commissioned by a Lutheran King of Denmark, reached the shores of India in 1706, the rest of India had never heard of the gospel, even in the immediate geographical neighborhood of the first-century orthodox church. A part of this first-century church became Protestant and today Indian Lutherans led by the UELCI are prepared

to accept pulpit and altar fellowship with this church known as the Mar Thoma church. The church is moving step by step toward unity, but what a communion? The geography, culture and racial backgrounds of the different church groups coupled with profound theological beliefs and affirmations, the material resources and their source in which also the believers have a stake, all this make it a Herculean task for the church in India to have even a symbolic unity let alone to talk about communion. Is it then possible for a confessional group to become a "communion"? As far as Lutherans in India are concerned—the objective, the dream, the vision was there—the vision of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in India. It was foiled by large churches with greater material resources that were not prepared to put their resources under collective management. Material resources can be either a dividing factor or a unifying factor. The criteria are the extent of material resources and their availability!

From their original vision of a federation, Lutherans moved to the idea of one church. The latter idea was abandoned as they continued with the federation concept for years opting for the United Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India without altering federal structures. Subsequently it moved very slowly towards a "church," the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in India, with two distinct dimensions of church and federation—a kind of Indian rope trick for which the German Lutheran organization, the Vereinigte Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche Deutschlands (VELKD), had shown the way.

The factors that divide the church or the community, nation- and world-wide, remain the same: material resources, race, caste and culture. One wonders if "communion," while it is a desirable goal and indeed one that inspires lofty ideals, can be realized given the reality of human nature and human life. Is it not the diversity in which humanity finds itself that is God's creation? I mean the color and the culture. Indeed, Christ's gospel inspires us to struggle for the mitigation of factors that divide society—such as prejudice, greed, exploitation—and it enables us to strive for justice, equality, and fraternity among people and nations. The reality of the "poor" is always with us, the gospel is always the mitigating factor in the world of exploitation.

The second challenge for communion is to confront evil in society. The church has only recently come to grips with social evils. Slavery was abolished due to the sacrifices made by devoted Christians such as Wilberforce in England and Lincoln in the United States. Nevertheless, the institution of slavery received the blessings of the bell, the book, and the candle. The missionary church followed the New Testament message of the apostles who exhorted believers to care for widows and orphans. Inequalities and exploitation have become part of the social and economic systems. The church cooperates with these systems and is happy for any benefits it can get out this.

Today, we are faced with the systemic exploitation of society. The powerful nations are not prepared to give up their privileges. The pretext for the Gulf War was allegedly to save a weaker country from a tyrant. In reality what was

at stake was control over the crucial oil resources of the region. No one dares challenge the power the rich G7 nations have over the world, and the US and the UK assembled their latest and most powerful weapons of war in the Gulf to make that message clear. One nation has assumed the role of global policeman and is supported in this by a few rich nations. These want to ensure the supremacy of their race, the advantage of modern technology, control the world's resources and markets. In other words, to prevent competition from new countries that have the potential to develop their technology, industries and markets by controlling the flow of information and brainwashing the world to accept their leadership and superiority. The intention is to keep two thirds of the world at subsistence level serving the needs of the rich.

What can communion do in the face of the challenges of these kingdoms and principalities? In other words, has the church, if it is true to the gospel, any choice but to resist evil?

The divisive forces within the church are loyal to the divisive forces outside the church that have established the evil empire. The church itself is not clear regarding its mission. This theological confusion is convenient for those who are satisfied with the *status quo*. I suspect that the LWF is in this state today.

Let me conclude by saying that the church, as a communion, will be a power to be reckoned with in the world if the communion is committed to truth in Christ, follows Jesus in his practice of confronting the rich in church and society, and is willing to take up the cross and to submit to the destruction of its body. Then and only then can God's truth and justice be established in the world. There is no other way for Jesus himself said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." (Jn 14:6)

On Being Church in India

Gnanabaranam Johnson

The Distinctive Characteristics of the Lutheran Churches in India

The community that gathers every Sunday morning to worship the Triune God in a church or particular building is understood as belonging to the church. The Indian slogan *Yaddha Deva, thath baktha* means that the devotee is imbued with the characteristics of the deity she or he worships. If Christian worshipers do not reflect Jesus' mind in their lives, it means that either their worship is not genuine or that they do not worship Jesus at all.

Some members are eager to adore and praise Jesus. It is easier to worship and praise Jesus than to obey and follow him. Sadly, those who worship Jesus outnumber those who obey and follow Jesus. There are more who discuss Jesus' life and work than those who believe in Jesus.

According to *Confessio Augustana VII* (CA VII), it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine word. There are people who believe that the church exists only on Sundays, since the preaching of the gospel and the administering of the sacraments take place on Sundays only. They forget that the worship continues even once they have left the church building on Sunday and lasts until the next Sunday morning when the members of the congregation enter the church for worship.

There are those who claim to be the members of the true church since they do not baptize children (only adults), or insist on speaking in tongues. They apparently do not know that preaching the gospel with the pure understanding means the gospel should not be confused with the law. Proper administration of the sacraments means that the grace of God is operative in baptism and the real presence of Christ present in holy communion (*cf.* Formula of Concord).

The Old and the New Testament are the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines must be appraised and judged (*cf.* Formula of Concord). The Scriptures are interpreted according to the Bible's central message, "For by grace you have been saved through faith" (Eph 2:8). There are bibliolaters who are excessively enthusiastic about the literal interpretation of the Bible. By not interpreting the Bible according to its central message, the bibliolaters take peripheral issues and mislead the congregation. The distinctive features of the Lutheran churches in India are adoration of the Triune God, Sunday worship, baptism, holy communion, the Scriptures, and evangelization.

Society's View of the Church

Indian society is not homogenous but heterogeneous. Christians constitute only two percent of the total population and roughly 10 percent of the population are friendly toward the church. The reasons may be that they studied at a Christian school where they enjoyed good Christian fellowship or they might have good Christian friends. Roughly 10 percent of the population are hostile towards the church, possibly because they do not like people of their own faith converting to Christianity. They regard Indian Christians as stooges for Europeans and North Americans. The remaining 80 percent of the population is indifferent towards Christians; most people have not had any exposure to Christians. They learn what Christianity is all about by observing how Christians live in society, not from the Bible or Christian books.

The church members' view of their church is subjective. When those at the bottom end of society were liberated by the church from the atrocities and brutalities they had been subjected to by those who had enslaved them they were thankful to the church, an instrument in God's hands. Some people from the upper classes found peace, comfort, and courage in Christ and warnings against the sinful life in the Bible, joining the church after coming to the conclusion that the Christian faith was the true faith. These were two distinct groups of people. Nonetheless, we cannot conclude that it was always the poor who aspired material benefits from the church while the rich sought spiritual benefits. In some cases it was the other way around.

As in every church there are those who criticize the church for not living up to the standards set by the church that existed at the time of the apostles. The status of the church depends on the character and lives of its members. The church that exists for those outside the four walls of the church will grow both in numbers and strength.

Tensions Between the Church's Theory and Practice

The church sets high standards which its members find difficult to fulfill. As Clement of Alexandria said, just as God's will is creation and is called "the world," so his intention is the salvation of all people and called "the church."

Instead of the church entering into the world and changing it, the world sometimes enters the church, changing it through evil influence. This results in the tension between how the church should be and how it actually is. Nevertheless, the Lord of the church purifies the church through Word and sacrament. The warning given to the seven churches (Rev 2:1-3:22) applies to the Indian churches. "If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent" (Rev 2:5). If the light is removed, we are in darkness and no one can find the disparity between theory and practice. The

members of the congregation are to pray for the blessings of the Holy Spirit. Proof of being filled with the Holy Spirit is that the members will acknowledge Jesus' Lordship: "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit." (1 Cor 12:3)

Although in the church there should be no difference between upper- and lower-caste Christians, between rich and poor, between the employed and unemployed, in reality these differences exist and the church should concentrate on eradicating these differences. While it cannot guarantee that its members will never sin the church can help in the fight against sin through the Word of God and counseling. Christ not only offers forgiveness of sins, but also liberation from sinful habits (*cf.* Jn 8:36). The bridegroom, Jesus, has only one bride, viz. the church. The disunity among various denominations is a self-contradiction. If there were fighting among a nation's air force, navy, and army, that nation could not conquer its enemies. If there is no harmony among the various instruments in a symphony orchestra, there will only be discord and cacophony. As long as the churches do not come closer together in Christ, they will defeat the very purpose of their existence.

The Christian God is a missionary God; the church, the body; and evangelization, life. If a church is not interested in gospel work then it is a lifeless church. Any prayer without petitions for the success of the gospel work is incomplete. In the Lord's Prayer, "Your kingdom come" is the petition for evangelization. The church is a community that experiences the power of Christ's resurrection. Gospel work is the articulation of the resurrection experience. The proclamation of the gospel is the church's primary task. The church should enable people to experience the power of the resurrection (*cf.* Phil 3:10). If its members do not evangelize through their personal lives, there will be a tension between the church's theory and practice.

Different Ecclesiologies

From time to time the importance given to certain ecclesiologies changes. Eighteenth-century ecclesiology was based on conversion. Without this emphasis there would not be congregations in many places. We have to thank God for the pioneers who under difficult circumstances took the gospel message to faraway places. Although on the one hand Christian leaders fought against the cruelties committed in the name of religion, such as human sacrifices, the burning of widows, and the system of keeping bonded laborers, the church on the other hand tolerated many un-Christian structures in society, such as the caste system, oppressive economic structures, and militarization. The church did not enter into those areas where its survival could be threatened. Despite the missionary effort, only two percent of the Indian population is Christian. Yet Christian concepts such as the holiness of God, God's

willingness to suffer for humankind's salvation, and the equality of people are gaining momentum among other religions.

Liberation theology was an eye-opener for those members of the congregation who were in fetters. Theology that had hitherto focused on the other world came to deal with problems of this world. God does not want God's people to be fastened with shackles of slavery and poverty until they reach the other world. While stressing the liberation of a person from individual sinful habits, there is a tendency to neglect the demonic reality of corporate sin perpetuated in society's inhuman structures. The fight against injustice is not outside the purview of the gospel.

The theology of prosperity is becoming increasingly popular. If you are baptized as an adult, speak in tongues, and pay tithes regularly, then God will bless you materially as God blessed Abraham, David, Job, and others. The prophets of the prosperity cult forget that in God's eyes poor Lazarus was the blessed one, not the rich man (*cf.* Lk 16:19-31). According to this theology a human being's spirituality can bring material benefits. When those who adhere to this theology do not reap material benefits their faith in God is weakened. The concept that the believer should sacrifice personal comfort for the benefit of others is entirely lost.

At the center of Lutheran theology we find that by grace human beings are saved through faith. There are groups that stress human actions such as adult baptism or paying tithes; and there is a tendency to neglect the free grace of God. These groups neglect the teaching that where there is genuine faith there will be good works, and where faith is fraudulent there will be no good works. Lutheran teaching on faith saves people from modern heresies. What we need are indigenous ecclesiologies that help non-Christian Indians to understand the atonement of Jesus. An ecclesiology that does not help strengthen the faith of the congregations and liberate people from poverty is not needed.

The Importance of the Idea of Communion

Communion is the spiritual relationship we have in Jesus, the common participation of the believers in proclaiming the Lordship of Jesus. The Holy Spirit creates the communion of believers through faith in Jesus. Baptism in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Mt 29:19) is the foundation for the communion with the Triune God. The Lord's Supper also draws believers into the communion of the Triune God "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread." (1 Cor 10:17)

This eucharistic communion is the basis for the coming together of the congregation in Jesus' name. In the Apostle's Creed we acknowledge the "communion of saints." We have both: communion with Christ and communion

with saints. As those who confess Christ, we have confessional communion. The communion that we Christians have with one another transcends death and is therefore important. Although Christians are divided by language, culture, and denomination, the bond that unites them in Christ is stronger and eternal. There are several factors that try to destroy the communion of believers in Christ. There are people who hinder the churches coming closer together by stressing uniformity instead of unity. The Augsburg Confession provides the minimum requirements needed for true unity: preaching the gospel purely and administering the sacraments rightly.

Main Topics Under Discussion

What about the souls that were born and died before Christ? According to Revelation 13:8 the salvation of humankind precedes the creation of the world. "He was destined before the foundation of the world." (1 Pet 1:20) Without Jesus nothing was created (cf. Jn 1:3). Some Old Testament people knew Jesus. Jesus said, "Your ancestor Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day; he saw it and was glad." (Jn 8:56) Moses regarded disgrace suffered for the sake of Christ as being of greater value. (Heb 11:26) The Israelites drank from the spiritual rock and that rock was Christ. (1 Cor 10:4) Wherever something good was done before the birth of Christ it was done only by the inspiration of the second person of the Trinity. Jesus is the Savior of humankind from the day of creating Adam and Eve. Jesus preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago. (1 Pet 3:19) Jesus was the Savior of humankind even before his incarnation.

Non-Christians claim that their gods and goddesses answer their prayers. How is that? A blind and deaf beggar used to ask for food before a dilapidated house where no one was living. Out of compassion a neighbor gave him food. Only after the beggar regained his eyesight and hearing he realized that the food did not come from the empty house but from some other friendly person. Although non-Christians have their petitions sanctioned it is Jesus who answers their prayers.

Another topic is: Will all people be saved? Some biblical verses speak for it, others against. We should leave this question to God, who is just and kind. We should not dare to deal with matters that are God's prerogative.

Finally, there is a desire to have a church that includes every human being. People desire a church where those who have not repented cannot be members. We should be thankful to the church without which millions of people could not find comfort and solace in Jesus.

Envisioning the Church as Community: Some Challenges from the Indian Experience

Deenabandhu Manchala

Attempts to recapture the community character of the church have been a recurring feature in the history of the church. The motivation has been the awareness that all social organizations, the church included, tend to institutionalize their existence for the sake of stability. On the other hand, the church knows that in the form of an institution it cannot witness to its faith with credibility and creativity. In all of these attempts, the norm has been the New Testament image of the church as a community of people.

Belonging to the Protestant tradition Lutherans are aware of Luther's notions of the church as a communion of justified sinners gathered around Word and sacrament. The church, as a gathering of people who are exposed to the dynamics and orientations of social, political, and economic processes—a visible expression of a theological idea—is expected to be different from other social units. Through its form and functions it attempts to witness to the faith that has brought it into being. The constant search for meaning and purpose of “being church” ensures that the church does not drift away from its basic purpose while trying to be empirically stable. The adage, *ecclesia semper reformanda*, stands relevant for all times. Moreover, as the world suffers from the devastating phenomenon of the fragmentation of communities and human life, a search such as this would certainly help the church recognize the purpose of its existence. Therefore, I commend this attempt to rethink the meaning of community and communion in relation to their societal existence.

The reality of living with inherited ecclesial notions as well as challenges posed by the context make it inevitable for the Indian churches to search ardently for new ways of being church. Such a search is difficult. People cherish a variety of notions of the church. Each claims authenticity by asserting loyalty to the biblical and ecclesiastical traditions. The Lutheran churches in India are in need of such constant introspection.

The Lutheran churches in India were founded as the result of the activities of German, American, Danish, and Swedish missionaries. These missionary activities started in the early 18th century and increased in the 19th and early 20th centuries. These churches, about 10 of them, are mostly in rural areas and composed predominantly of Dalits, backward castes, and tribal communities. They cherish different theological accents, liturgies, traditions, and administrative structures. Moreover, they own huge properties and institu-

tions, and enjoy the patronization of their partners in the West. The management of these institutions and their assets often makes the administrative structures of these churches vulnerable to the abuse and misuse of power. Present realities challenge the Indian churches not only in terms of what they can do, but also to examine what it means to be church in a context of brokenness. It may be helpful to focus on those features that characterize the brokenness of Indian society as points of engagement as we reflect on the form and function of the church.

Social Realities

Fragmentation: Traditions, cultures, languages, castes, classes, occupations, and various other social identities characterize the social diversity of India. They have held the diverse communities together, yet now they seem to have become divisive factors. Ethnic, linguistic, and religious conflicts have increased all over the country. Today, social relationships are guided by fear of the other. The dominant groups are asserting themselves as never before, imposing their own versions of the state, community, development, norms, and values. Those hitherto excluded and silenced are resisting their continued oppression and getting organized to fight for their rights, justice, and fair treatment.

Polarization: As elsewhere in the world, economic globalization has begun to unleash its destructive potential on the millions of poor in India. With a population of over a billion divided in terms of castes, religions, languages and regions, the implications are disastrous for the poor, the majority of whom are Dalits, backward caste communities, and tribals. They are being deprived of welfare services, loans, subsidies, and employment. They have become exposed to massive displacement and dehumanization.

Violence and conflicts: Armed conflicts, bombings, massacres, communal clashes, caste atrocities, gang rapes, and violations of human rights are increasing. With the collapse of democratic institutions and the criminalization of politics, violence seems to have become a viable way for getting things done and for seeking redress for grievances. Political and economic structures are being remodeled to benefit the rich at the cost of the basic human rights of the poor. Just one example is the ongoing struggle against the construction of a big dam in the northwest of the country, which would displace thousands of people in order to benefit a few rich farmers.

Degeneration of values: Individualism and consumerism are posing new threats and challenges. The market sets rules for social behavior; all patterns of relationships seem to be coming under its influence. The political and economic activities in the country continue to be guided by caste loyalties and dynamics. Corruption, abuse of power, nepotism, and lack of fairness in pub-

lic life have become rampant. The pervasive culture of silence is an important feature of this process of degeneration.

The State of the Church in this Context of Brokenness

How does the church see itself in this situation? Or, to what extent have the contextual realities influenced the lives of the Indian churches? A look at the reality of the Indian church is necessary at this point.

Institutionalism: Most Indian churches are institutionalized and managed by a few, in most cases, from the socially and economically privileged sectors of society. Institutionalism gives priority to maintaining discipline, hierarchies, and bureaucracy over the basic purposes for which the institution was established. Spontaneity and creativity are subject to official approval. Mission is institutionalized and carried out with specialists and trained personnel. The laity is relegated to being mere consumers of church services. One frequently comes across programs for community development, poverty alleviation, skills training, and capacity building, but most of these depend on foreign resources, which bring with them the possibility of corruption and conflict. To a large extent these resources are spent on infrastructure and maintenance. In those associations of churches, which we now call communion of churches, the access to financial resources is often the main reason for their being together. Other issues such as unity in spirit and witness are only of secondary importance. The management of resources and properties in centralized administrative structures has created and legitimized several unhealthy practices and trends. There is no place for interchurch interaction, mutual concern, sharing, and communication.

Denominationalism: The Indian church is as diverse as India itself, with numerous denominations, sects, and parachurch organizations often competing with one another. In each village and town, Christians are known by several denominational identities, some of which carry with them caste identities. With less than half a million members, the Lutheran presence in India is known through 10 ecclesiastical identities, each with its own liturgical and structural distinctness. In the context of community, which is driven by caste ethics, denominational presence is hardly an alternative. Denominational churches are primarily concerned with loyalty and obedience to tradition and authority and preference is given to denomination over mission. Their theology is not for the world but for the church. The leadership of such denominational churches also monitor and control interaction with other churches and organizations.

Exclusivism: The Indian churches exist as religious communities among many other such communities in India. Given to notions of self-righteousness, these churches maintain a detached and a "holier than thou" attitude

towards the world and people of other faiths. Politics and social issues are considered outside the realm of faith and people contribute to evangelism and expansionist activities but not justice and development oriented movements and activities. Narrow views of sin and salvation dominate their notions of Christian spirituality. Numerous conservative sects and associations influence many average Christians with their exclusivist and expansion-oriented theologies while ecumenical organizations and theological seminaries issue verbal statements in English and do not make an effort to reach the people in the pews.

Marginalization: The church is composed predominantly of rural, poor, non-literate Dalits and tribals, and its services are attended mostly by women. Yet the leadership remains in the hands of few urban, educated, middle-class men. In the life of the church there is no place for the concerns of the majority. There is blatant discrimination and marginalization on the grounds of sex, caste, and status. People participate at the local congregational level, but their participation, contribution, and connectedness to the larger organizational expressions of the church are not given due importance. What ultimately matters is the larger expression of the institutional church.

Towards Reclaiming the Church as Community

Reclaiming the Dalit identity: Existential authenticity depends on the consciousness and assertion of one's own identity. Despite the efforts of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in India (UELCI) the leadership of the Lutheran churches in India has not yet recognized the Dalit and tribal identity of the churches as a theological resource for formulating relevant responses in faith. In my opinion, acknowledging this inglorious and socially despised identity not only as a matter of fact but as a matter of pride can prove to be resourceful. Dalit and tribal issues are life issues and their experiences of marginalization and struggle to overcome the same are of significant missiological richness. These communities represent the marginalized sectors of Indian society and their experience eloquently exposes its unjust bases. They exemplify the brokenness of Indian society and by entering into their experience and reclaiming that identity, the church has an opportunity to deal with the brokenness within and outside.

The church as an alternative community: The Indian reality is characterized by the irresponsible assertion of power by the dominant forces. The majority of those who belong to the church are the victims of the social, religious, economic, and political power structures. Therefore, the churches cannot exist as power structures. The concept of community in India is limited to caste community. The Indian church needs to reinvent itself to become an alternative community, one that is inclusive, participatory, and sensitive to

the issues and practices of justice and equality. In fact, the church started as a community and remained one until the necessity of having to accommodate the vested interests of the dominant became an important preoccupation. Amidst experiences of persecution, mockery, and marginalization, and in stark contrast to the contemporary social norms, this community remained an alternative community. It was this character of the early church that brought several into its fold. It was a community of active hope that guided its form and functions to be in consonance with the eschatological ethics.

It has become commonplace to reflect on what the church can do for society. What seldom takes place is a discussion on the inner life of the churches, and attempts to deal with the rampant corruption, nepotism, mismanagement of resources, properties and institutions, the suppression of dissent, and the ways of dealing with the use and abuse of power within. Greater control and equality of opportunity must be ensured. The church needs to be society's conscience keeper and is called to be an agent of moral transformation rather than a mere philanthropic institution. Theological education must aim at preparing the whole people of God and not just the clergy for mission and ministry.

Unity at the level of people: Essentially the church is the people. One may find it extremely difficult to figure out community from the official versions of the church. One has to go to the local congregations to find some semblance of church. When we say that the church participates in the mission of God, we mean that the people participate in witnessing to the liberating and transforming power of God in the world. These experiences are local and take place in concrete communities. Since the church is a community only at the local level the church needs to rediscover "the local." In their own communities, the poor are struggling for their right to exist as human beings, for justice and equal opportunities joining hands with others who make similar experiences. This is a threat for the minority, institutionalized, foreign funds-dependant, caste- and class-conscious church and its leadership. But as a community called to witness to the hope of the coming reign of God, to participate in these struggles in concrete historical situations is the only way of being faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Non-institutional forms of communion: This recognition of the church in terms of the local would enable new and non-institutional forms of communion. The idea of communion does not really go with structured expressions. If we are serious about communion then we need to move beyond the controlled activities of institutional leadership. In the name of communion, institutional interests of consensus and discipline should not stifle creativity and difference of opinion. In other words, these expressions of "community" and "communion" must be guarded against the possibility of being used as instruments of oppression. In a context as divided as India, denominational ecclesial presence and activity are hardly an alternative. Therefore, the communion that

we seek must be grounded in our affirmation of faith in the God of life. To that extent, seeking communion with those from other ecclesiastical backgrounds, other living faiths and secular organizations must be encouraged.

Therefore, our search for new ways of being community and communion implies that we affirm the church as people. If people and their issues are normative, then their experiences of exclusion as well as of overcoming the same should become points of engagement for a credible ecclesiological exploration for the churches in India and elsewhere. The organizational expressions then would only be facilitators for the people of God to make present the coming reign of God as they respond to the prompting of the Spirit in each situation of time and space.

Bringing Hope to the Suffering: A Malaysian Perspective

Naomi Hamsa

Malaysia is a multiracial, multicultural, and multireligious country. The population of Malaysia comprises 52.5 percent Malays and other indigenous groups—Orang Asli, Sengoi, Semai, Kadazan, and Iban; 30 percent Chinese; 8.1 percent Indians; and 9.4 percent others. The Malays are exclusively Muslim, the Chinese mostly Buddhists, and Indians mostly Hindus. Christians are in a minority and comprise about 9 percent of the total population of 19.2 million. There are two distinct social groups, namely the Bumiputras (“sons of the soil”) who are the Malays, and the non-Malays. The Malays have dominated political affairs while the Chinese have run the economy. The Malays are accorded certain constitutional privileges such as full scholarships for studies and a quota system at universities whereby more seats are allocated to Malays; entrances to governmental services and the private sector; special discount when buying property; and a special banking system called Islamic Banking system. According to the constitution the Malays cannot be converted to Christianity. No one has the right to question the rights or privileges of the Bumiputras.

However, the Christian churches have a definite role to play in society as they look into the various social problems facing the Chinese and Indian communities.

Social Issues

Modern life is becoming increasingly complex and stressful. The country's socio-economic development over the past few decades has greatly affected the socio-cultural system of the various ethnic groups and resulted in the gradual breakdown of support for the disadvantaged members of society.

The constitution provides every religious group with the right to establish and maintain charitable institutions. Christian churches provide institutional care for the needy and reach out to the following target groups:

- *Children*: protecting children from dangers such as abuse, torture, discrimination, and exploitation; fostering the child's physical, social, emotional, and mental development; equipping children with suitable values that will provide them with a sense of purpose and direction in the future.

- *Adolescents*: providing support and guidance in order to be better equipped to face emotional upheavals and pressures, and to face this phase in their lives comfortably and confidently.
- *The disabled*: providing treatment, rehabilitation, education, and training as well as encouraging efforts to integrate them into the mainstream of society.
- *Poverty*: making efforts to alleviate poverty in rural and urban areas.
- *Women*: promoting through education the active participation of women in addressing social problems; providing socio-economic programs, social education, skill training; giving assistance and guidance to women dealing with social problems such as divorce, widowhood, and abuse to help them achieve self-reliance; giving protection and creating rehabilitation facilities for vulnerable women.

Other target groups include convicts and criminals; victims of crime or drug abuse; victims of disaster; the elderly; terminally sick patients; single parents; and ethnic minorities. This list of target groups is subject to change based on the needs of society. Moreover, the church reaches out to the poorest sectors in society such as the "hard core" poor, the Orang Asli, and the Indian communities,

The Council of Churches in Malaysia (CCM) and the Lutheran Churches

At the Lutheran Consultative Conference for South East Asia, which convened in Penang in 1952, it was decided to organize Lutherans into indigenous churches. This happened in Malaysia. The CCM tried to unite the different Christian churches but due to the large number of national and ethnic churches the CCM found it difficult to break through denominational self-sufficiency. Even the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malaysia, the Lutheran Church in Malaysia, the Basel Christian Church of Malaysia, and the Lutheran Church in Singapore come together only for study and fellowship since due to racial, cultural, and linguistic differences and distance, each church has its own agenda of social concern ministry. Through its own social ministry the church reaches out to the Indian and the Chinese population.

Because Christians are a minority group in Malaysia, the churches sometimes cooperate in their social ministry. Today CCM has 20 member churches and associate members from all parts of Malaysia, including the Lutheran churches with the exception of the Lutheran Church in Singapore. In accordance with the Christian faith the CCM has over the years responded to national disaster, social, and political upheavals and global issues.

Christian Agencies

Today, there are 107 Christian-based social agencies in Malaysia that employ full-time staff and carry out formal programs in cooperation with the local churches. Work among children, drug addicts, and the disabled seems more popular than working with the poor, youth, and women.

Interestingly, 71 percent of the Christian agencies were established in the 1980s and 1990s, the majority of which were set up by new charismatic churches. A greater social awareness and the Malaysian government's propaganda generated this Christian response. Christian groups tended to respond with a "compassionate heart," while failing critically to appraise current approaches to social work. There is an urgent need for a more professional approach while not losing the Christian identity, witness, and presence.

Challenges and Struggles

Christian churches and agencies along with other voluntary and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a crucial role as care providers alongside the government. As a Christian community we must challenge the modern age and be careful not to be dominated by it. We should establish homes, institutions, or community-based educational programs, health care, and income-generating projects to help people overcome bondage, protect them from harm and evil, and assist them in a new way of life. Specifically I am thinking of agencies such as drug rehabilitation centers, alcoholic anonymous, and halfway houses for battered women and children.

The challenge for us Malaysians is to pool our resources toward projects that will benefit the marginalized. Finances and human resources are limited, and church-related social agencies face struggles similar to NGOs. Compared to other workers, social workers have little status, little recognition, and little income. Only a few committed Christians offer their time and service to social ministry.

Some Recommendations:

- Christians should not aggravate the land and property shortage by acquiring more. Rather, they should learn to share with those in need. Industries should be shifted to the rural areas in order to ease the squatter problem in urban areas. Christians are urged to use their influence to help the government implement such a policy.
- The Christian community should pool its resources to generate employment by establishing vocational training colleges, providing resources for small-scale industries and cottage industries.

- Christians are encouraged to promote human rights by using their influences on various agencies (such as the bar association) and policy makers.
- Christians should establish hostels for youths, especially in urban areas; vocational training centers for dropouts from school; halfway houses for the homeless; daycare centers for children and orphanages.
- Church leaders and clergy should be trained in marriage counseling.
- The church as the champion of the oppressed should work alongside the police, legal authorities, family counselors, psychologists, and social welfare officers to help abused women. Help should be provided to both victim and perpetrator. This includes education since many women are still not aware of their right to enjoy peaceful coexistence and the fact that no one has the right to harm them. Many women are still subjected to cruelty and violence in the home.

The Christian Response

There is a marked imbalance between evangelism and social concern in the churches of Malaysia. Some Christians are so involved in sharing the gospel that they forget their social responsibilities. We should be able to affirm that according to our Christian conviction and understanding of the Scriptures, both evangelism and social involvement are part of our Christian duty. The great commission (to make disciples) must go alongside the great commandment (to love one another). We should obey in all seriousness the full and holistic teaching of the Word of God. By stressing the importance of social concern, we are simply trying to rediscover and to reaffirm some of that which is already inherent in biblical faith and practice and to live by it, by the power of God.

The Christian response to suffer should be through involvement with the suffering communities, the so-called "horizontal relationship of co-responsibility." We are challenged to identify the root causes of society's ailments. The church must be on the side of the poor, the marginalized and disadvantaged. This can be done by speaking on behalf of the poor and oppressed, public awareness raising through objective study and use of the media, organizing family programs and pre-marital counseling.

The church should encourage youths to be involved in vocations that bring about social change and compassion. Many churches have special formation programs for youths and efforts have been made to reach out to young addicts, delinquents, and unwed mothers. Through their conduct Christian youths can be "salt" and "light" to their school peers. The Christian community should take special care of its youth because they are the future leaders of our church, society, and nation.

Further Courses of Action

In general the church has not addressed the wider issues such as poverty, human rights, domestic violence, environmental damage. Priority is given to evangelism and church growth instead of organizing seminars and conferences to motivate and challenge the Christian public for action. The church in Malaysia should attempt the following:

- encourage and challenge its members to consider a full-time ministry as social workers;
- encourage members for voluntary service;
- develop courses and study programs in Christian social ministry at local theological or Bible colleges;
- set funds aside for training;
- rediscover the ministerial role of deacons and deaconesses in *diaconia*;
- train laity in social work and counseling;
- motivate, teach, and preach to the congregation about social ministry with relevant sermons;
- encourage the fuller involvement of Christians in society, in other words, in politics, arts, media, and community development.

Speaking out on and constructively criticizing social and political issues can promote Christian values. Gifted Christian writers should be encouraged and supported to write regularly to the newspapers and magazines to express the Christian opinion. Thus Christians are playing roles as "leaven" and "salt." There is general feeling that Christians are only concerned with their own interests and only speak out when their rights are being impinged on. This image should be rectified. Christians cannot shy away from government service for many "Josephs," "Daniels," and "Esthers" are needed.

Conclusion

Christian compassion implies the "horizontal" relationship with those who suffer. The Christian community in Malaysia is being called anew to share in concrete and practical terms the healing, renewing and life-giving compassion of Jesus Christ. For Christians, those who claim allegiance to the Lord and live in true fidelity to God and in harmony with others, the kingdom of God is not some event far in the future. It is a reality. The presence of Christ can be made available to the world only through communities of disciplined Christians. It is a privilege for us because we are called to bring hope to the suffering society. We should allow the Holy Spirit to tap our creativity through faith, liturgy, worship, art, music, architecture, and theology. Along with that we have to identify with the struggles of God's people and continue to heal

the world through God. Then the presence of Christ will be made manifest in our midst. Therefore, the church has the responsibility to reflect on and to satisfy the legitimate needs of the people so that in the process of participation the kingdom of God is restored.

Some Aspects of the Church's Witness in Hong Kong, Indonesia, and Taiwan

A New Life for the Church in Hong Kong?

The church in Hong Kong has yet to learn to stand in solidarity with its compatriots in the interior of China who have not been reached by the wealth of the market economy. In fact it is they who suffer most from high inflation. An influx of immigrants from the mainland has occurred, and it is of great concern to the people in Hong Kong. The immigrants are, on the whole, regarded as competitors; there is considerable fear that the standard of living will drop because of the influx. Should the church of Christ have a different attitude towards the newcomers? Christ calls us to share, not to possess and, fortunately, many churches have started to minister to immigrants from the mainland.

Being a *communio* in the community is not easy, especially at times of great social and political upheaval. Different movements within the church threaten its unity which is essential to being a *communio*. The church has to learn to differentiate between the essence of Christian faith and the *adiaphora*. Charity should prevail and bind us together. The *communio par excellence*, the Holy Trinity, exemplifies the calling of *communio*. As the Son is sent from the Father, sacrificed for the salvation of others, so be the church of Hong Kong. Whereas by identifying with the need of the Chinese people from and on the mainland, the church in Hong Kong may lower its standard of living, it will, nonetheless gain new life.

Andrew NG Wai Man

Witnessing for Christ in Indonesia

Indonesia is made up of 300 hundred different ethnic and cultural groups speaking over 250 different languages. This diversity means that it is difficult to bind Indonesia into a unified nation, whose national motto is *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, "Diversity becoming Unity."

Today the churches are dealing with the theological issue of how to live and witness to Christ in a pluralistic social, cultural, and religious situation. The major concern is how to realize "diversity becoming unity," which, for Indonesia, means keeping national security and stability. In some cases government officials ignore human rights for the sake of those two goals. According to article 77/1977 of the constitution, a *rumah ibadah* (a house of God, such

as a temple, church or mosque) can only be built upon the recommendation of people living in the same area and is subject to government approval. Since Christians are a minority it is difficult to get such a recommendation to build a church and, as a result, there are many congregations that do not have church buildings. They have to worship in houses or rent public halls.

The government has used article 8/1985 of the constitution, which outlines procedures related to mass organizations, to legitimize its intervention in the church (which it has defined as a mass organization).

The government and church members need to be reminded of the following:

- The church is not a political or mass organization and should not be defined as such.
- As a religious institution, the church is a body separate from the state. This is in accordance with the nation's ideology (*Pancasila*) and the theological principles of Christianity. Accordingly, the church should be recognized as the sole authority with regard to ritual and its leadership.
- Church members are called to be faithful and obedient witnesses to Christ in the midst of society, nation and state both as individuals and as an organization.
- The church is called to serve, guide, instruct, and counsel wherever needed.

Darwin L. Tobing

The Church's Self-Understanding in the Society of Taiwan

Society regards the church as a charitable institution and place of worship. In Taiwan other religions, such as Buddhism and Taoism, are more popular than Christianity. Whereas society thinks positively of the Christian church it does not regard it as the only, or even the best, place to worship God. Christians regard the church as a place where they are taken care of, and only few know that the church is a basis for missionary work and social service.

Since the church is Christ's representative on earth and Christians the light and the salt of the world, Christians are responsible to help the poor and needy. The church faces some difficulties in this task due to a lack of commitment and little understanding of social outreach.

Social outreach is emphasized in baptism and confirmation classes which might help new believers to motivate the church to find new ways of involving itself in the community. Church leaders and ministry staff try to lead the church into social work in practical ways in order to build good relationships in the community and thereby hoping to play a leading or influential role in the community. In light of today's materialistic lifestyles the church needs to set a good example and help society discover the true value of life.

If we want to give a good testimony in every community, we need a good communion among all the churches. There are many different denominations

in Taiwan and even the Lutherans have seven different synods. Therefore, the theme of communion is not only a concern for the Taiwan Lutheran Church, but also for all other denominations.

Chuang Tung-Chieh

Church Structures and Globalization: Asian Perspectives

Ginda P. Harahap

For the majority of the people of Asia, globalization has not been a blessing. Most Asian countries face a social, economic, and political situation that is becoming increasingly explosive. Globalization has resulted in new forms of exploitation, dependence, and the impoverishment of a larger number of people. In much of Asia this is experienced in the unequal distribution of wealth, interreligious tensions and violence, cultural and environmental destruction, and political instability.

Churches and communities are decisively shaped by certain global forces. Churches are challenged to examine whether their structures are not too limited. Continuous criticism, renewal, reformation, correction, and changes are absolutely necessary if the church wishes to be authentic. The church should no longer simply be a "gathered community," a "chosen people," but, rather, a "people's movement" that helps the community and is visibly in solidarity with the society in which it exists.

There is a need to review how ministry (Word and sacrament, diaconic work, preaching, teaching) shapes church structures, and how traditions may or may not enhance the overall work of the church. The church needs to evaluate its structures and decision-making processes. Today, the church needs to critique its structures as part of the process of renewal.

A number of questions such as the following challenge the churches.

- To what extent do the present church structures hinder the church as it carries out its ministry?
- How do the present structures enable congregations, members, and pastors to be effective?
- Are certain policies (e.g. constitution and by-laws) outdated so that they limit or prevent the church from carrying out its mission and responding to globalization?
- Do the present structures allow for different sectors in the church to be involved in ministry?
- Does bureaucracy prevent congregations from carrying out their ministries?
- Are the administrative costs too high because of the kind of church government (e.g. meetings, committees, boards, commissions, departments, and administrative offices) being practiced?
- Is decision making confined to only a few individuals? Is it the rule of the majority or rule by consensus?

The vision of communion should be reflected in the governance structure of the church (take, for example, the Indonesian Lutheran churches: general synod, church council, district council, resort council and congregational council). While some Asian churches are comfortable with an episcopal structure, others prefer a semi-episcopal one, a synodical, or congregational one. Regardless of the form, authoritarianism and anarchy need to be guarded against.

The church and its bishops must ensure that its offices are essentially pastoral by encouraging the delegation of administrative tasks, inclusivity in decision-making mechanisms (for example, involving the laity, women, youth, handicapped), and accountability for their performance.

Church structures need to be shaped by the gospel and encompass the following elements:

- *Proclamation*—mission and evangelism, theological education, Christian education, nurturing, communication, and so on.
- *Services*—health, education, integrated rural development, community development projects, and so on.
- *Advocacy for justice*—promotion of inclusive and participatory communities, human rights, justice, peace and reconciliation, mainstreaming of women and youth, empowerment of the poor, and people with disabilities and indigenous people.

There is a need to balance the tension between proclamation, service, and advocacy for justice. Many churches still have problems with this tension. Questions usually raised are: How do we balance the tension between proclamation, service, and advocacy—and which one should come first? In a multicultural community where do we begin? Where does proclamation fit in? Some churches want to focus only on proclamation. Nonetheless, since the gospel covers life in a holistic way, they should go hand in hand. Proclamation is not only about words but includes deeds.

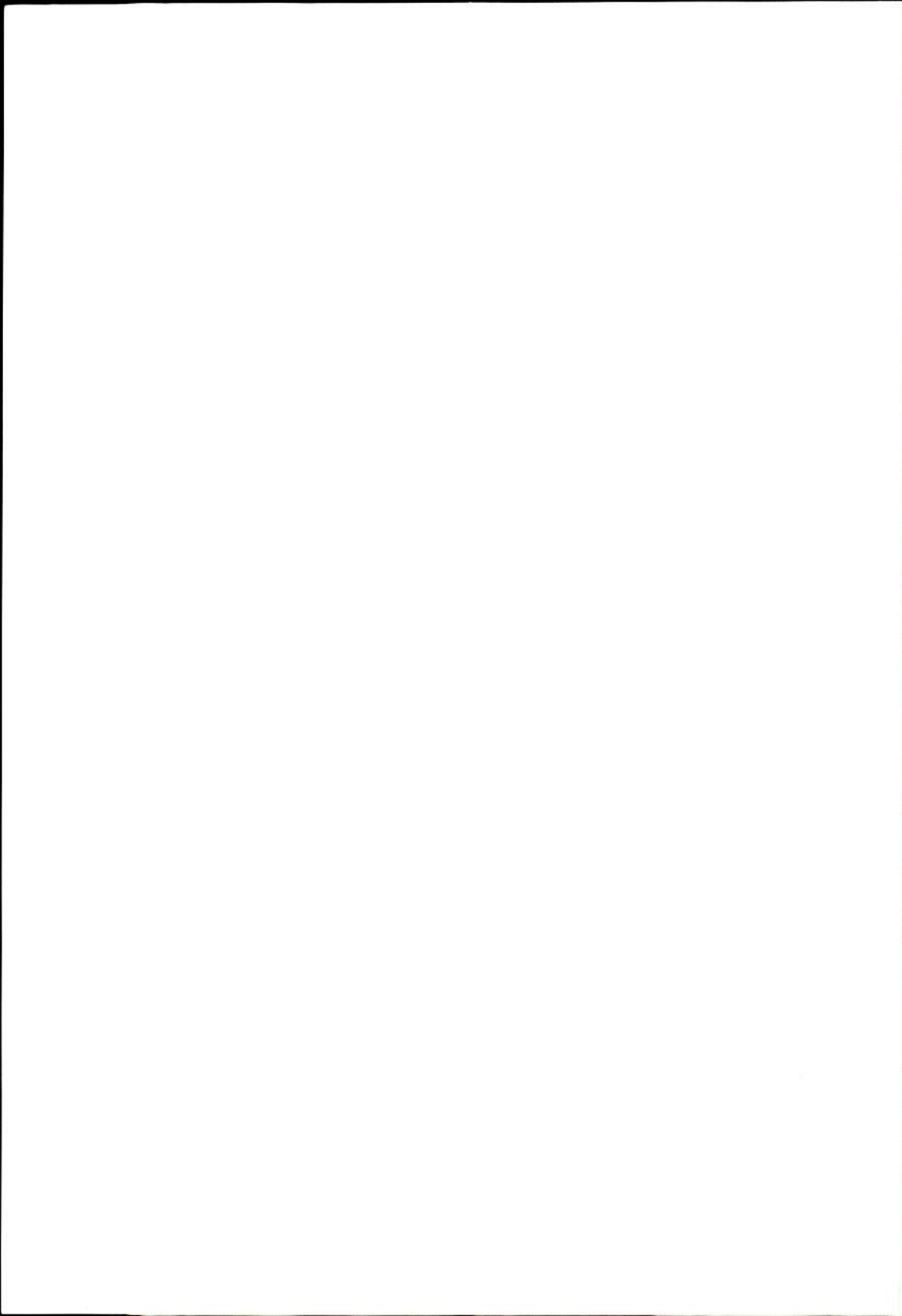
The churches are challenged to balance all these elements. How can the people of God be best equipped for the ministry in the world? How can the gospel be best shared in a given context? How can we ensure that it is the gospel that is being preached and administered?

The church structures should reflect a holistic view of the local church's ministry. Basically, the present church structure seems to leave the congregation with only one function, namely worship, while the rest of the comprehensive functions are delegated to committees and commissions outside the congregation. The congregation is reduced to being no more than a pious weekly prayer group.

Church structures need to allow for the development of local congregations; the church's holistic ministry at the grassroots level; and leadership training for clergy and laity as well as programs in self-reliance. For example, the Indian Lutheran churches have already selected one congregation as a

pilot project for implementing what is called "A four-fold holistic ministry," worship, nurture, evangelism, and development.

The church structures should reflect a number of important areas of the church's responses (for instance, justice, reconciliation, partnership, mutual respect) to globalization with an emphasis on such challenges as poverty, violence, ecology, or other religions. Thus the church can play a proactive role in sustaining a healthy community.



Saint, Servant, Prophet: A Theological Reflection on the Church in Asia

Vitor Westhelle

Introduction

Our task here is to build bridges. Bridges connect margins but, what margins are we talking about? What is the river, channel, or canyon the bridge must span? Does it lie between theology and the church, between theory and practice? Is it as obvious as we suppose? Or, might it be between different cultural presuppositions, between Asian and European ways of acting and reasoning, between Dalit consciousness and Sanskrit ethos, between Christianity and Hinduism, between the kingdom and the world? It might well be all of the above at the same time.

I recently saw a picture depicting San Francisco's famous Golden Gate Bridge under construction. The margins are connected through a maze of steel cables sustained in the middle by two towers. In this old picture the bridge was being built not from the margins but reaching from the two towers in both directions, to the shore and to the middle of the channel. The towers themselves are held in equilibrium by the cables attached to the margins, and as such they serve as the actual platform from which the bridge spans. Allow me to take this image as an allegory for our work in Chennai, India. The steel towers that sustain the bridge building are the two disciplines I am calling upon to help me reflect on the situation we have been asked to consider. The steel cables that sustain the equilibrium of the towers and will bear the weight of the bridge are the models of ecclesial formations I shall be identifying as normative for the Asian and, particularly the Indian, situation. The building of the bridge itself is the common task we have been engaged in during our discussions and conversations. Taking for granted the anchorage that the margins provide and relying on the structure that the steel towers offer, my concern will be to gaze at the process of bridge building itself. What happens, pragmatically, when the surface of the bridge is laid down in suspension? What kind of a passageway will it provide? Will it reach from the towers to the margins and between the towers so that they meet each other?

We shall not be able to resolve these questions here but, we will gain some indications of the feasibility of the project, to the options that can be pursued, its limitations and promises. I shall intentionally avoid direct reference to other essays or discussions, for the point here is neither to demonstrate nor to criticize, but to learn and reflect in a context different from the one I

come from while trying to offer a vision of possibilities and challenges. What follows, then, is unabashedly a voice different from Eastern wisdom and a gaze different from the one with which Asians see their own reality. My observations will not presume to be detached but, instead, constitute a striving for a participatory engagement and an attempt to contribute to the process of bridge building itself.

India loomed large in the Asian realities that were projected during the presentations upon which this collection of essays is based. While that may demand a disclaimer, it must not be an apologetic one. The limitations we set ourselves and the priority given to India can be seen as a window on some of the challenges Christianity is facing in the region. Whether this view is representative enough will have to be determined *a posteriori*. It does mean that the scenario is manageable and we are thus protected from being obfuscated by the immense and bewildering brightness that blinds one by the simple utterance of the word "Asia."

Characteristics

Sociological

What is most striking about Asia in general, and India in particular, is the minority character of Christianity in the midst of a tremendous religious pluralism and, particularly in India, abject poverty. Whereas the estimated 2.6 percent of Christians in India might seem an extremely meager figure if compared to the 83 percent of Hindus or even the 11 percent of Muslims, let us not forget that this figure does represent around 25 million people in India alone—more than the entire population of Scandinavia. Were we to add to this figure the estimated 9 percent of "unchurched," or unbaptized believers in Christ it would be like adding to our demographic comparison the whole population of Germany. While Christians in India (or Asia) form a tiny minority, they still constitute a significant mass if compared to worldwide Christianity and particularly to Christian Europe.

Numerical mass notwithstanding, due to their minority character the Christian churches in the region have a rather well defined profile that is in stark contrast to the broader cultural reality. That profile is often sharpened by the adverse environment in which these churches have had to survive. Typologically these churches represent the opposite extreme of the folk churches of Europe, facing many problems and challenges, while certainly also avoiding the pitfalls of the latter.¹ The result is a Christian ethos that is extremely self-

¹ Cf. Else Marie Wiberg Pedersen, "Ecclesiology and 'koinonia.' The folkekirke in Denmark—a case study," in Wolfgang Greive (ed.), *Communion, Community, Society: The Relevance of the Church*, LWF Studies 1/1998 (Geneva: LWF, 1998), pp. 49-61, for an illustrative case study and criticism.

conscious of the critical insights it can offer into a society shaped by values alien to Christianity. Nonetheless, this critical potential has its downside as well. Society at large and often Christians themselves perceive the stranger's gaze as being tainted by a European ethos, failing to create an authentic indigenous expression of the faith. On the opposite end of the scale the Indian Christian ethos is accused of eagerly avoiding this colonialist stigma and thus inculturating in search of legitimacy. The importation of the caste system, as is sometimes observed in the life of the Indian churches, represents the saddest example of such inculturation.

On the positive side we can observe a fervor in affirming the evangelical voice of Christian otherness on the one hand, and creative attempts at expressing the faith in an inculturated form on the other. It is between these two extremes not easily resolved—critical otherness and inculturation, cross and incarnation, to use theological categories—that the most significant sociological option lies and it is this area that designates the poles between which alternatives are being sought.

The churches strive under circumstances that do not allow for much laxity in the tension between critical otherness and inculturation. A firm structure must compensate for the low demographic representation and the vulnerable yet well defined ethos that constitutes the uniqueness of the Christian churches in the Asian context. The result has been the emergence of rather rigid structures necessary to maintain a body disciplined and vigorous in the face of in the adverse environment in which these churches exist. This appears to be the reason for an acute suspicion of institutionalism felt particularly by intellectual leaders and praxis-oriented militants who perceive the defensive strengthening of structural organization as being a hindrance (what was called "churchianity") to the church's prophetic and evangelical mission. This characteristic feature leads me to the other analytical "tower" from which the passageway spawns.

Ecclesiological

A rigid organization combined with a strong distrust of regimental institutionalism manifests itself in a tendency to de-socialize the church. This could probably be better expressed as follows: while the *communio* is de-socialized or even spiritualized, the sociological reality of Christian ecclesial organizations and institutions is de-theologized. It was interesting to observe that in the midst of the discussion the triad (designed by Wolfgang Greive) our ecclesiological project is working with—*communio*, community, society—was substituted by the binary antagonistic placement of *communio* in its strict theological and ideal sense on the one hand, and institutional church as a social reality on the other. Missing was the middle term, represented by the concept of "community" that would require a translation of *communio* to

society and of the concrete social formation of the church to its theological significance.

This sounds as though we might have a case of ecclesiological Nestorianism. Like Nestorius who denied the possibility of translating Jesus' human features to his divine nature and vice versa, we appear to have a similar phenomenon being played out in the realm of ecclesiology, the doctrine of the body of Christ. In this illustration the social and the spiritual dimensions are sort of attached to each other without communicating with one another. The church is either spoken of as the community of believers (in an ideal spiritual sense) or as an institutional organization. The way in which the two are connected is far from clear. However, these comments are not meant as heretical red-flagging. On the contrary, they point critically to a consensus that has prevailed in Western, Latin tradition, namely the *logos* Christology and its ecclesiological implications. The challenge presented by the Indian Christians should be evaluated not by its "*logos*-deficit" but rather by what they suggest implicitly or explicitly. In other words, the principle for interpreting the Christian message relies more on a pneumatic, spiritual orientation, in the anointing of the flesh by the Spirit, instead of on an hermeneutic of communication between the divine and the human. This seems to be a rather interesting alternative that is indeed closer to the Ebionites' messianism, to Paul of Samosata's anointing Christology, and even to Nestorius, but definitely removed from docetism, and monophysitism, which in this light could be regarded as the temptation of the West. I believe this to support the claim that there is indeed a promising alternative between critical otherness and inculturation, as suggested above. What Western, Latin tradition might regard as deviant may still appear as a different and yet arguably "orthodox" reading of the same tradition.

In the emerging ecclesiology we were exposed to, the social nature of the church is clearly viewed with suspicion, particularly as far its regimental organization and hierarchy is concerned. Only little data was provided on the social reality of the church, its demographics, its structure, its power dynamics, its social stratification, and so forth. Instead, emphasis was laid on the theological affirmation of it being the priesthood of all believers. But once again we are confronted with what seems to other eyes a paradoxical attitude that grows out of what, for brevity's sake, I will call a "Nestorian strategy" (without implying, thereby, any strict Nestorianism or an heretical charge). At the same time as the priesthood of all believers is affirmed in ways not so very different from the classical pietistic interpretation of it, there is also a very strong, even respectful, deference to hierarchical offices.

Finally, there is a strong emphasis on recognizing the church as a community of the cross. The church regards itself as a community of healing and nourishment in the midst of abject poverty. To a large extent its members share the lot of the destitute. Due to its allegedly colonial roots Christianity is frequently discriminated against (as in, for instance, China, India, Malaysia,

and Indonesia) and Christians identify strongly with the suffering Christ. Although, particularly among Lutherans, the cross is recognized as a distinctive mark of the church (a *nota ecclesiae*, *par excellence*; cf. Luther's "On the Councils and the Church"), it is worth noting that the traditional "marks" of the church assigned by the Lutheran confessional writings, namely the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the sacraments, were conspicuously absent from our discussions and the presentations we heard. Whether this is possibly the result of the "Nestorian strategy," remains open for discussion. More important than the specific fine tuning of confessional identities is the relationship of Christianity to other religions.² This is indeed a challenge not yet surpassed, and it is in Asia that it has and will have to demonstrate the church's capability of asserting its distinctiveness whilst co-habiting with different religions, worldviews, and diverse political regimes.

Distinctiveness

The self-understanding of the church in Asia defies North-Atlantic typologies or models of the church. For example, the classic Weber-Troeltsch types of "church," "sect," and "mysticism" lose their analytical strength when we are faced with ecclesial realities that are recognized more by the blending of different characteristics of those ideal types than by the distinctiveness of one of the options.³ Neither "church," nor "sect," nor "mysticism" capture the most striking elements of the ecclesial formations in Asia, although elements of different types might be found in each particular case. A similar conclusion can be reached with the five models elaborated by Dulles.⁴ In this case also, distinctive characteristics of Asian ecclesial formations are not sufficiently stressed.

Other more "regional" approaches, inaugurated by H. Richard Niebuhr's analysis of North American denominationalism, developed by Peter Paris for the African American communities and Edwin Villafañe for the Latino communities in the United States,⁵ suggest that the universalist proposals, with

² It is worth noticing in this context that in the Evian Assembly of the LWF, which marked the turn of the LWF from the North-Atlantic axis to the rest of the world, Gustaf Wingren prophetically and polemically proposed a reading of the Article VII of the Augsburg Confession that suggests an understanding of the church as encompassing a freedom for "more than merely 'unity of churches'." Cited in David P. Scaer, *The Lutheran World Federation Today* (Saint Louis/London: Concordia, 1971), p. 27.

³ Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, vol. 2 (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 993-1013.

⁴ Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York: Image, 1978). There is in the case of Dulles one of the exceptions. His "servant" model is still largely relevant for the analysis of the ecclesial formations in Asia, and I will adopt it with some variations in what follows.

⁵ See Richard Perry, "A Critical Comparative Analysis of 'Ideal Types' in the Ethics of Ernst Troeltsch, H. Richard Niebuhr, Edwin Villafañe, and Peter Paris," Ph.D. dissertation at The Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 1997.

their implied transcendental and *a priori* claims (as Troeltsch's or Dulles') miss the mark and are in themselves unaware of their own cultural conditioning. Taking into account that my approach will of course be subjective, I would like to propose a different set of models that I saw delineating themselves in the midst of the reports, discussions and presentations.

The formations I am suggesting—different from the types of Troeltsch but somehow closer to Dulles' models—are not supposed to provide a grid for explaining the church's sociological or theological nature. Rather, the goal is to identify exploratory characteristics that allow one to recognize the programmatic intent and missiological self-understanding of the churches. In other words, we want to identify under each of the formations a "mission statement" that guides ecclesial praxis and shapes the imagination of its leaders. To avoid confusion regarding terminology I shall refrain from using the terms "types," "ideal types," or "models." Instead I will use the expression "imaginary formations," or simply "formations," to convey that which is being described as the imagined and projected self-image of the church rather than the ideal features or functional models that can be recognized in the practice of the ministry. In addition, imaginary formations will emphasize the particular theological characteristics that are recognized as dominant in a given ecclesial community and reveal strategies for the church's mission.

The imaginary formations I recognize as prevalent and distinctive in the Asian churches are those of saint, servant, and prophet.

The Saint

As "saint" the church envisions itself and each one of its members as being set apart from the ways of the world. It knows that it is *in* but is not *of* the world. A strict moral and spiritual regime assures every Christian their distinctiveness. Under the impact of this imaginary formation the church capitalizes on its counter-cultural elements while standing in the midst of the world as a living witness without attempting to transform the world, for, *qua* world, it remains hopeless. The goal being pursued is to create a sacred and safe space where a renewed existence might flourish. The saint relies in the moral strength of its character and trusts it to be powerful enough to overcome adversities. Temptation, seen as a lure into the ways of the world, must be resisted, although being on trial is also seen as something that builds and strengthens character. The church as an empirical and social reality is perceived as being fallible. It is the receptacle, the vessel that this world provides for the spiritual community to be hosted, and as an empirical reality broader than the sainthood that it hosts (the saints are an *ecclesiola in ecclesia*). The "Nestorian strategy" unfolds in this imaginary formation through a high regard given to the spiritual gifts, the *charismata*. Although these are re-

ceived as a surplus they are not guaranteed as any endowment, as it would be the case if we were to take a strong sacramental approach. Although the charismatic movements and Pentecostal expressions of the faith in Asia would naturally fall under this formation, it is not restricted to them. A strong emphasis on personal moral responsibility is a distinct expression of sainthood—a trait that has probably been inherited from the pietistic missions of the past.

When corrupted this formation, instead of offering itself as an alternative to the world *in* the world, becomes a way of fleeing from the world, a denial of the cross, and an evasion from the suffering of society. A further problem that can beset this formation has to do with the pluralistic religious context in which Christianity is inserted. A self-acclaimed holiness can become a form of bigotry against other religious expression. There is only a very thin line dividing the sainthood's consciousness of being set apart from the zealous attitude of being set against others and demonizing different forms of spirituality.

The Servant

The self-understanding of the church as a servant in the world has its biblical foundation in the notion of *kenosis*, of God's self-emptying Godself in the world. As a servant the community sees itself as being there for others, called to manifest in society the gifts it has received by assisting the downtrodden of the world comforting the wounded and healing them. The church is basically seen as an agency, as a social diaconal instrument. Unlike the saint, the servant does not see himself as being anointed with qualities that are an end in themselves, but as a medium in service of the world. The goal of the servant is to provide solace to those in need channeling resources that the church has or administers. If the saint formation is more prominent in Asian countries that have achieved a higher degree of social and economic development, the servant formation has a more defined profile in places such as India where the vast majority of the population lives below the poverty line. The church as agency operates not only with its own resources, but above all with substantial international church aid to carry out its diaconal task. Here too the "Nestorian strategy" reveals its face in a low-key sacramentality. But unlike in the saint formation, where the emphasis was placed on the Spirit's supernatural gifts hovering above the earthly vessel of an empirical church, it is the empirical church (the *ecclesia militans*) with its social and political organization that really counts here. Its spiritual reality (the *ecclesia triumphans*) is seen as a motivating and inspiring source, a soul that assures the body of the nobility of its mission, a spiritual compensation for the expenditures of the flesh.

When corrupted this formation can be compared to the shepherd who feeds on the flock (Ez 34). This is a particularly significant temptation when great sums of money are involved. The problem here is not personal embezzlement. The most degenerating feature of this temptation is to conceive of the diaconal agency, the church or organization working for and with the church, as an end in itself, metamorphosing the original end, the needy, into a means for the maintenance of the agency itself.

A second temptation can also be identified in connection with the self-understanding of the church as a diaconal agency. This is a little more complicated. Let me illustrate it with a story attributed to John Chrysostom. At the beginning of the Constantinian era the church, enriched by resources of the Empire, started to institutionalize its diaconal work, creating asylums for the needy and the foreigners (hence its name: *xenodokeia*). It was this bureaucratic organization of diaconia that enraged Chrysostom who denounced this strategy for carrying the mark of what today we would call assistentialism. According to the great preacher, those institutions, in spite of their benevolent intent, were hiding the face of the poor, thus protecting the church from the need to confront them and be directly responsible to them. Assistentialism can, and often does, perpetuate the problem it tries to address by not allowing the face of the other to have a claim and therefore forcing a response, calling for responsibility. It might ultimately perpetuate dependence and dehumanize.

The Prophet

Different from the saint who creates in the world an alternative space protected from the evils of the world, and from the servant who aims at assisting the downtrodden of the world by healing their wounds, the prophet denounces the world and aims at changing it.

In other words, the prophet wants to deal with the causes that produce suffering and injustices. But similar to the saint, the prophet knows herself to be set apart. It is in this being set apart that the prophet gains the legitimacy to indict the world. Similar to the servant, the prophet too knows and is concerned about the wounds of the world. What distinguishes this formation is the concern to address the root causes of the injustices that produce the wounds of oppression and exclusion. Contrary to the previously considered formations, it is not the community itself that produces the values that orient its practice. The values are drawn from the kingdom of God, which is set in striking contrast to the ways of the world. The prophet, like the saint, but unlike the servant, does not compromise. Unlike the saint, but similar to the servant, the prophet's gaze is directed at the world. However, this gaze comes from outside. The "Nestorian strategy" manifests itself in this imaginary for-

mation precisely in this attitude of taking a distance from and indicting the world, of not partaking with the values that shape culture. The Hindu notion of *avatar* (normally translated as "incarnation") conveys this idea of a spiritual descent, a privileged attachment to a messianic figure but falls short of a radical embodiment in immanence, short of an affirmation of the finite being capable of encompassing the infinite (*finitum capax infiniti*). The prophet remains focused against but standing beyond this world.

When corrupted this formation might lead to the inability of recognizing the possibilities of emancipation that cultural values might entail. The prophet speaks from outside the wall and the indictment is often plagued by a severe insensitivity to evil whose roots are not only socially generated but also deeply enmeshed in human brokenness. Frequently this leads to a lack of a sense of community and to the compromising yet real promises it offers. If the saint is the spiritualist and the servant the realist, then the prophet is the idealist.

Evaluation

With the help of these imaginary formations I have tried to recognize some distinctive trends in the ecclesiological self-understanding of the churches in Asia. Other formations could be conceived and their actual overlapping can certainly be recognized in particular cases. But it is my contention that these three, on the basis of our discussions and presentations, reveal the sharpest contours for discerning the actual ecclesiological self-understanding of churches in Asia. With them come certain strengths and deficits which I would like to mention briefly.

Strengths

Forged in the midst of a challenging multireligious context, and in some cases also demanding, if not oppressive, political situations, one of the most remarkable features of the Asian churches is their clear sense of Christian identity. This is despite—or because—such an identity does not translate itself as clearly into confessional distinctiveness.

Along with this sense of identity comes the awareness of the minority character of the Christian witness which shapes a sense of faithfulness that is often costly. The Christian minority in Asia—unlike the Troeltschean "sect" type which is described as a minority that sets itself apart but still within a culture largely shaped by Christian values—finds itself in closer proximity to the experience of the early church, in a way in which the West is unable to experience. The decisive feature of this minority character is that while showing creative ways of inculturating itself in a reality so unlike the Christian West it

also exercises a counter-cultural practice. To borrow from the title of an ecclesiological project the LWF carried out in the 1970s in Asia, the church is called to be salt and not mirror of society, notwithstanding the fact that it has in some cases been co-opted into reproducing within its ranks some values alien to the Christian message, like casteism, or patriarchalism.

Those practicing the Christian vocation in a minority situation are confronted by a particular challenge in the Asian context. The churches need to claim their autochthonous character within a context in which Christian communities are frequently identified as a product of colonial imposition, or at least as an unfortunate heritage. The claims to being a fruit of a pre-colonial evangelization, which in popular piety go as far back as Saint Thomas, merit further studies as to their theological, if not historical, possibilities. One needs to distinguish the unpalatable historical evidence of Saint Thomas actually having reached the east coast of India, from the theological significance of affirming one's identity by attaching it to the claim that this identity is founded in a pre-colonial evangelization. Even early colonial voices in Asia that defended an inculturated expression of faith, such as Matteo Ricci in China, or Francisco Xavier in India and east Asia, should be a source of inspiration. This is a particular challenge for Lutherans, insofar as they are defined prominently as a reformed movement within European Christendom after the European colonial project had started. At the 1970 LWF Assembly in Evian an unidentified Indian delegate asked a question that was not rhetorical and resounds until today in want of a response: "Why should the Indian church abide by a confession written in Germany in the 16th century?"

Finally, in the midst of a fragmented world that has experienced what some call the exit of master narratives, it is heartening to see in Asia Christians who, instead of despairing in face of the apparent loss of great social projects, are actually engaged in micro-experiments finding in what is small the beauty of new possibilities. From small and focused development projects to liturgical explorations that do not presume universal applicability, these micro-experiments are a vital source of renewal for the church and lend to it a credibility that outlives the fragmentary and transient nature of such experiments.

Deficits

Along with these strengths come some shortcomings that I venture to name, fully aware that these eyes that see them are the eyes of a foreigner whose gaze may be distorted by distance. Although I see interesting possibilities in what I defined as the "Nestorian strategy," there are indeed some issues that pertain particularly, but not exclusively, to the Lutheran tradition. It has to do with the basic objection Luther voiced against Nestorius, namely the question of the communication between the divine and the human, between the lan-

guage that pertains to the analysis of our social, historical, and natural reality and the language of faith. Two different but interrelated observations can be made in this context.

First, there was some difficulty in examining the church as a social institution with fallible but necessary structures. The tendency was either to view it as a spiritual *communio* or as a corporate apparatus necessary for the performance of certain socio-religious duties. As the former, the language about the church lacked the capability of translating the spiritual and theological significance to the ambiguous realm of a socio-historic entity as the church in its sociological sense is. As the latter, equal inability could be observed in rendering theologically meaningful the talk about the church as a social corporate entity.

Second, at the social and secular level of analysis there was a lack of a comprehensive approach capable of connecting different areas of everyday life, such as the market, cultural characteristics, social phenomena, environmental issues, and religious expressions. All of these areas emerged offering very important data for discussions, but we could not get a feel for how they are interconnected and determine or influence each other.

Here a challenge evinces itself. It is curious to notice that it sends us back to the aforementioned ecclesiology project developed in the 1970s by the LWF Department of Studies. At that time much of the malaise recognized in the Lutheran churches was linked to what was regarded to be a misuse and abuse of Luther's so-called "two kingdoms doctrine." Now, reviewing the Asian ecclesial situation, it is interesting to notice an almost complete lack of reference to Luther's thinking on two spheres. I don't think that any resurrection of that "doctrine" (which for Luther was never a doctrine!) would be of any help due to what was made plain in the studies of the 1970s, but there is something that should not be thrown out with the bath water. I am referring to Luther's understanding of the relationship between faith and reason and to the distinction of a Christian being simultaneously facing God (*coram deo*) and the world (*coram mundo*) without separation or confusion. This distinction which is basically a distinction of languages, of semantic fields that ought to be in communication with each other, yet distinguished from each other, is important if one is to have a vigorous analysis of the social situation with categories that will allow one to get closer to the roots of the social problems and also to their theological implications.

Promises

I have suggested a certain proximity between the Asian situation and the early church. In it lies a promise that can be fulfilled in the Asian context. This promise entails an option the early church itself had to take, namely to

apply its eschatological vision to an efficient ecclesiology in which the church emerges as the space of healing and liberation at the center of the whole of God's creation, offering to it a solace and demanding accountability. In the ancient cultures of Asia, where the Christian churches are often regarded as a novel appearance, it is worth being reminded of a popular text of the second century, exactly when Christian eschatology was receiving an ecclesiological identity within a context of ancient religious and cultural traditions. The church had to shape its eschatological vision into an ethos. And as new as it would appear to be, this ethos needed to be recognized and affirmed as an original and founding one. In chapter IV of Book I of *The Pastor of Hermas*, the author describes a vision he had of an old woman who approaches him with a book. She hands him a copy, and the story continues:

Now a revelation was given to me, my brethren, while I slept, by a young man of comely appearance, who said to me, "Who do you think that old woman is from whom you have received the book?" And I said, "The Sibyl." "You are in mistake," says he; "it is not the Sibyl." "Who is it then," say I. And he said, "It is the Church." And I said to him "Why is then she an old woman?" "Because," said he, "she was created first of all. On this account is she old. And for her sake was the world made."⁶

In the early years of the church it was still surprising to see it being represented by an old woman since it seemed to be such a novelty. But this is precisely what Hermas' vision contests. The novelty was really the oldest of all realities: an ordinary community at the center of all of creation for whom all was made. To make such an affirmation on Asian soil, populated with the Sibyls of ancient cultures and religions, should be as daring and promising as it was for Hermas in the middle of the 2nd century. And as it was for the 2nd century, it is a risk-taking vision and not an imperialistic presumptuousness, as it can be when interpreted in the context of imperial Christendom.

⁶ Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (eds.), *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2 (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994), p. 12.

The Church and its Context: India and Malaysia

Else Marie Wiberg Pedersen

When examining the Asian churches' self-understanding and their Christian identity, it is of paramount importance that we see each church in its social context. This is so because, when focusing on questions of society and the way in which the church relates to such questions, it is society's values that influence the church, and thus its relevance to the world, rather than the other way around.¹ The presentations given by the various Asian Lutheran churches at the Asian regional consultation are all evidence of this, although in different ways.

In the following I shall try to analyze the relationship between society and the Lutheran church in two very different countries: India and Malaysia. It is vital that we describe the society of which the church is a part before trying to define its self-understanding in relation to this society. How does the church understand itself (the ideal) and how does it act (the practice) in relation to the particular society of which it is a part?

India

Post-colonial India is characterized by strong nationalism and conservatism. As for nationalism, Christians have turned against imperialist or pseudo-imperialist tendencies and have adopted the theses of non-Christian nationalism. In May 1998 we saw evidence of this trend. "If needed, it can be made in numbers," said India's minister of foreign affairs. Unfortunately he was speaking about producing nuclear bombs to secure India's frontiers, not about a method of securing India's inherent ticking bomb: the vast number of people living in slums without proper housing, and the equally vast number of unemployed.

The statement on nuclear weapons production is a clear illustration of India's desire to put itself on the world map as an independent nation—with the power, if necessary, to impose its independence. Some of the Indian presentations conveyed this strong desire to show independence alongside a more positive attitude towards Western missionary churches. Nonetheless, an outspoken hostility towards the West looms large, accusing the West of continu-

¹ This is the very outset of this LWF ecclesiology project.

ing colonialism in the process of globalization. Simultaneously, and quite ironically, Indian society shows a certain neglect of its internal problems, inherent in its very structures (500 million live below the poverty line, 130 million children, most of whom are girls, have no access to primary education).

India, is a country of contradictions, pervaded by tradition and Hindu ideology while aspiring to be a modern nation. While a democracy, it nonetheless remains deeply divided by caste, class, religion, and tribe (ethnicity). India is an extremely conservative country, in which an oppressive and dividing moralism seems to eclipse a liberating and unifying ethos. While people bear various external marks of religious and social identity, there is a noticeable lack of street signs making it difficult to find one's bearings. One can hardly help seeing in this a deliberate effort of maintaining the *status quo*.

Church as communion

Ideally, the church as communion is perceived, much in keeping with tradition, to be a communion among Christians, assembled in spiritual relationship in Jesus Christ (*cf.* Gnanabaranam Johnson). Nevertheless, this ideal of church as communion is also recognized as being at best a hypothesis, although one worthwhile striving for (*cf.* Kunchala Rajaratnam)—definitely a less idealistic view (in recognition of the depressing reality of Indian society?) or, rather, an anti-Western view.

The real practice of the church is experienced in two, almost contradictory, ways: as a communion of believers and as being extremely exclusive. The truth is that it is strongly hierarchical: both power and economic resources lie firmly in the hands of the church leadership. Being as fragmented as Indian society itself, divided not only by caste, class, and tribe, but also by gender (violence against women is repeatedly mentioned as being a serious problem), there is neither real sharing of resources nor real space for people in the church. Therefore, although experienced as a communion of believers, the church in India does not practice the priesthood of all believers.

Church and society

Ideally, evangelization through people's personal lives might help overcome the tension between theory and practice. It is generally recognized that Christianity is understood through its actions (ethos) in society, and that it would have a positive, liberating effect on society were the church to practice the equality it proclaims.

In reality, certain non-Christian social structures, such as caste, economic (dis)order, and the military, are tolerated by the church, which on the whole cooperates with the system. In other words, the church is an integral part of society's problems, and evidently most church members consider commun-

ion to be a distant utopia—a solely abstract vision. Indeed, if “communion is at best a hypothesis,” as expressed by a representative of the very elite of the Lutheran church in South India, the church will remain a part of the complex societal problems, and there is no hope for change. Thus, in spite of the inspiration from the growing number of church members with a Dalit background, society tends to enter and change the church rather than vice versa. Moreover, we find an internal colonialism, closely linked to tribal interests, exercised not by the church as such but by its members. All in all, there is little understanding of the church as a community within the community of communities, so that hardly any interchurch cooperation and only very limited interest in ecumenical meetings are discernible.

Nevertheless, some “movement” can be seen by virtue of increased activity at the grassroots level, where the empowering of people to fight for land and to re-organize society is a recurring slogan. Likewise, there are glimpses of hope in slum areas where interchurch social work under the high principle of doing “the social gospel” (an old missionary term)² among the poor, regardless of confession, has begun.

Church and the world

The churches stress that, ideally, establishing a just and united church in a just and united world requires proper ecumenical dialogue, mainly among Christians. In such a dialogue the Lutheran church in India wants to establish its own way of thinking and its independence. However, as the term “ecumenical” is so unequivocally stressed as the identification with the poor and marginalized of India, there is a tendency to see the ecumenical approach as something done, or even inflicted, only by others, not by the church in India.

Reality reflects the conviction that the rest of the world is to blame. And on the whole, the perception of the global situation is characterized by old ideologies combined with a strong nationalism.³ Even though the regional church seems to play no significant role in the ecclesiological self-understanding, globalization is regarded as a new form of capitalism and colonialism together, holding in its grip not only India but also all of Asia. To complete the enemy image, the ecumenical church organizations with their global outreach are equally targets of the critique directed towards the West as a

² For a short elaboration on this slogan and its development through the adaptation by Walter Rauschenbusch and W. Visser't Hooft, where it is translated into a principle of reciprocity between Christianity and society, see Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “Memorandum. Das ‘Social Gospel’ (soziale Evangelium),” in *Werke* 12 (Christian Kaiser Verlag: Gütersloh, 1997), pp. 203-212.

³ See the fine article by Jyoti Sahi, “Der Heilige Raum im indischen Denken - Seine Bedeutung für Mission und Ekklesiologie” in Monika Pankoke-Schenk and Georg Evers (eds.), *Inkulturation und Kontextualität. Theologien im weltweiten Austausch. Festgabe für Ludwig Bertsch SJ* (Frankfurt am Main: Josef Knecht, 1994), pp. 308-321.

whole. The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) (and in relation to that the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany) for example, are criticized for imposing ideas and ideals, such as the concept of church as communion on the church in India, thus ignoring diversity for the sake of unity. The global church organizations are identified with multinational corporations, the only difference being what "products"—ideas, institutions, or soap—they "impose" on innocent Indian ground (thereby spoiling the "home market" or self-contained economy, which would be India's true salvation). However, there are also voices that strongly stress the need of help from international organizations and corporations literally to incarnate the hope for a better future. These contrasts illustrate the Asian frustration about the slow pace of the independence process.

Malaysia

The Lutheran church is a very small minority church placed in an Islamic state, comprising large groups of mainly Buddhist Chinese and mainly Hindu Indians. Although the constitution of Malaysia allows freedom of religion, this multiracial, multicultural, and multireligious country provides only Malaysian Muslims with financial, social, and educational privileges. The logical result is that on the whole non-Malays—amongst whom the Christians, mainly Tamil-speaking Indians, constitute a tiny minority (9 percent)—face enormous social problems of every kind, from domestic violence to slum-living.

Church as communion

The ideal church is "the champion of the oppressed." As such it should identify with the poor, marginalized, and disadvantaged in society, being called to "horizontal relationship with those suffering." In Malaysia the emphasis is on the church as the anticipation of the kingdom of God—a present reality founded on the faith in the presence of Christ, not some future event. Unlike India, there is a strong awareness of the church's real presence as opposed to being an abstract utopia, and what is needed is not so much inscribing the suffering and brokenness as an aesthetic image of the church as real action to overcome the suffering.

In reality, the Malaysian church structure is hierarchical and, due to a strong charismatic impact giving impetus to a prosperity gospel, the emphasis is much more on evangelism and church growth than on "horizontal relations." Therefore there is an urgent need to teach members that the church is the body of Christ where each member plays an important part (1 Cor 12), and, for instance, women need to be empowered and encouraged to take part in church leadership.

Church and society

Ideally, the church sees itself as called to share through involvement and participation with all those who are poor and marginalized by society. Thus there is a recognition that the practice of Christian social work, as a response to the government's social program, will have an impact on society and promote Christian values. On the whole, there is an awareness of how the church should ideally act in relation to society and Malaysia's social problems at large, without losing its Lutheran identity but also without upholding a futile two kingdoms' dualism.

However, in reality, social work is carried out among Christians only. There is an imbalance between evangelism and social concern, having community among Lutherans solely, without any elaborate form of community within the community. In this respect, the Lutheran church is primarily ecumenical, not ecumenic, in the sense of doing outreaching interchurch work.

Church and the world

The ideal of the church in the world is a community in Christ confessing the presence of Christ in order to bring hope to the suffering body of Christ, not least by viewing the universal church as the body of Christ (Eph 4). To outlive such an ideal, there should be a comprehensive engagement in social work not only at the national but also at the international level.

In reality, in Malaysia no outward work is being done by the church. Rather there is a "one-way-ticket" from West to East, which, given the size of the church, is quite understandable. Nonetheless, here is a much more positive evaluation of a more global collaboration than could be deduced from the church in India. Especially the cooperation with the Church of Sweden and the LWF on internal problems is highly esteemed.

Comparison

The most characteristic common feature of the Lutheran churches in Asia is that they are minority churches within post-colonial and non-Christian societies and as such more or less caught between a need for independence and a "donor syndrome." They are churches within very hierarchical societies, and as such they themselves are strongly hierarchical. They also all reflect a growing recognition that the church should be a "people's movement" which accordingly must strive to democratize its structures. Two interconnected concepts function as battle cries of this recognition of a need for democratization, namely empowerment of people and de-institutionalization. The latter concept, which could easily be misinterpreted as constituting an abolition

of all sorts of institutions, quite on the contrary expresses a wish to reorganize church structures and reorder society. Thus, the churches ideologically and counter-culturally want to set up new standards for being church and being society by morally forming and empowering people.

Very much in keeping with the observations made in a South African context by John De Gruchy, the churches are acknowledging that democracy will only function when people have been morally formed and empowered to fulfil their social responsibilities and achieve social justice and a fully human life. Hence there is a need for institutions that, in De Gruchy's words, "foster and enable such relationships."⁴ The church which confesses the Triune God, implying "a social program"⁵ reflecting such social actions as cooperation and communion, must be found among "institutions which foster and enable" meaningful relationships that can bring about social justice. Hence the church as communion and community play an important role in the process of the democratization of society's structures.

If our understanding of God as Triune is to be more than notional, "we must have experienced co-operation and community here on earth, from which the divine analogy may come alive."⁶ "Hence the importance of the role of the church and other religious communities in the process of democratization."⁷

What is thus stated is that we understand life backwards, most often moving from experience to theory. Similarly, we only understand the notion of cooperation, of communion, and of community, if we experience it in our social life. However, out of nothing comes nothing, and a good theory that is not translated into good practice has no impact whatsoever. Church and society alike must be experienced as just and democratic to create socially responsible members and citizens.

With regard to the ecclesiological self-understanding there is some difference, at least in focus, to be perceived between the church of India and the church of Malaysia. Both churches put emphasis on an immanent eschatological aspect of being church, here and now, but with different results. Whereas this focus on a present eschatology in Malaysia is stressed counter to an acceptance of the *status quo*, in India this focus at times collapses with the Indian borders, so much so that the kingdom of God seems to be perceived as an Indian society freed from the rest of the world. The national feeling and the longing for being totally independent sometimes seem so strong that they

⁴ John W. De Gruchy, *Christianity and Democracy* (Cambridge: University Press, 1995), pp. 247-48.

⁵ See Miroslav Volf, "The Trinity Is Our Social Programme," *Modern Theology* 14 (1998), pp. 403-23.

⁶ *Op. cit.*, (note 4), p. 248. His citation is from David Nicholls, *Deity and Domination* (New York: Routledge, 1989).

⁷ *Idem.*

constitute the *eschaton*. Combined with an apparent lack of self-criticism and lack of accountability, also in relation to the global situation, the end result is that the Lutheran church in India does not appear to view itself as a local church being responsible for and actively part of the universal church. As formerly mentioned, small steps are being taken in direction of "moving home" the social problems of India, doing the "social gospel" instead of simply blaming the rest of the world. These steps, albeit small, show that once India's social problems are being treated as its own there is a real possibility of taking action, both as a communion and as a community. In Malaysia this is already recognized, and there is good reason to believe that a sound interaction between communion, community and society, between the local and the global, each learning from the other, will change things for the better.



Power, Sacraments, and Mediation

Guillermo Hansen

I would like to consider three issues that I see recurring in what we heard at the Asian regional consultation. These have to do with (1) the *asymmetrical relationships* within the church and the need for adapting the ecclesial structure to the vision derived from the concept of *communio*; (2) the understanding of the church's place and action in the world as a *sacramental* reality; and (3) the need for certain *socio-cultural mediation* in our reading of the present times which, in turn, will guide us in a realistic assessment as to what our role might be in the midst of the different demands voiced by the "people's movements." As we shall see, the manner in which we "order" the contextual data will certainly condition the profile of our confessional identity; nevertheless, the "grammar" of this identity will re-conceive the issues that arise from a given context.

Our Vision of Communio and the Reality of an Asymmetrical Partaking

The presentations and group discussions at the consultation gave evidence of the extent to which the Lutheran churches in India mirror society and its deep divisions involving class, caste, and gender. More to the point, several voices signaled the abuse of power and hierarchical conception that determines the self-identity of church officials—bishops and pastors—at the cost of the dignity and status of the laity. Two sets of questions can be posed in this regard: how can church structures and their "division of labor" become more transparent to the *communio* we partake in Christ, and to what extent do these structures mirror a *culture* of power in the church's life and organization?

It is a fact that members of the church at large, as well as its ministers and officials, are always engaged in a process whereby power must gain acceptance. What kind of power must the church retain in order to be church? What symbolic horizon justifies and regulates the exchange of power? Can the concept of *koinonia* or *communio* become a kind of criterion for these matters? While the latter certainly does not provide a blueprint for how churches should organize their lives it nonetheless defines the contours and colors of a landscape to which the church seeks to be transparent. Transparency, of course, also has to do with how we deal with power: the power to make certain things

visible, and others invisible. Are the relationships that we establish among ourselves transparent to this eschatological vision of communion and love? Are the ways in which we share goods and exchange power really a living tale of the gospel by which we have been called?

This leads us to our second question about the mirroring of patterns of power. According to the French philosopher Michel Foucault, people and communities are always the byproducts of certain socio-cultural configurations of power. Power should not be naively perceived as a dominating action from above, but rather as a "decentralized" dynamic woven into the fabric of countless knots of power—practices which shape the larger power structure in which we interact. Accordingly, institutions and larger social configurations—such as the church—are cast in the mold of "decentralized" power-practices, in turn coloring, transforming and expanding the mechanisms existing at lower levels—notably, families, and smaller units in society. This means that the mechanism of power we may feel called through the image of *koinonia* would be completely inefficient for redressing the asymmetrical relationships within the church if, at the same time, there is missing a larger cultural action within the "smaller units" that build up larger communities. If at this level, for example, an hierarchical criterion regulates the relationship between men and women, then it should not come as a surprise that these patterns are mirrored in the structure and life of our churches. Our image of *koinonia* is therefore not only an ecclesiological motif, but a cultural project as well.

The Sacramental Dimension of the Church

The second level that I want to address is the place and role the church should seek in society. At the consultation it was stated in various ways that the church in India is either seeking *too much* to do or, in actual fact, doing *too little*. Activism and quietism, messianism and spiritualism, social relevance and evangelism are some of the categories we heard. In brief what can a relatively small church belonging to a minority religion within a country so vast, so diverse, and so plagued by social injustice, actually accomplish? We know that evangelism is one dimension within the larger horizon of the church's mission, and that the church's mission participates in God's mission in the world—who will call *everything* unto Godself. We know that our mission and presence must be integral—"holistic" as we say now. But how do we keep our integrity in focus, as we recreate our identity, within such an overwhelming and sometimes bewildering situation?

I believe that understanding the church as a sacramental community may help us locate and pace ourselves in this turmoil. Sacramental does not signify here liturgical or "high church." It is employed as a synonym of "symbolic," that which renders another reality present (as it is held in the sacra-

mental practice of our tradition). In this fashion the symbolic or sacramental is not something external to the signifier and the signified, but the means by which the hidden becomes visible.

How does this sacramental dimension affect the church's place and role in society? Two main points emerge within the scope of sacramental ethics. First, the "places" where the church seeks to live out its sacramental dimension may vary from context to context and from time to time. In any case it always seeks to render, in an "happy exchange," the one who is invisible *visible*, and the one who is excluded *included*. The church, as a community of saints and sinners, is this gift of God that gives a place to the "placeless," uplifting sacramentally in and for the world the dignity and freedom of those who seem out of this world. Secondly, it is not possible for the church—especially for a church in a minority situation—completely to live out that which it signifies. A sort of "messianic inflation" is not uncommon when the church heeds God's call to be responsible for the welfare of the world. The church's action cannot be measured merely in terms of quantity or quality since the nature of its actions is not *directly* political or social. Through its symbolic actions the church can in part anticipate, but not replace, what must be the action of multiple agents and organizations seeking limited goals in a limited space. The church will have to choose where and with whom it must be, knowing full well that this very choosing is destined to be superseded, even canceled out as history may move in a different direction.

Socio-cultural Mediation and Our Realistic Assessment

The last point leads us directly to another topic frequently touched upon during our consultation. It has to do with the hopes and expectations of the community and the institutional possibilities to channel these. Several of our Indian colleagues' presentations were beset by references signifying the effects of "globalization," and the lack of an adequate response on the part of the churches against the onslaught of the free market, consumerism, and so on. The church is not the only party responsible for the improvement and transformation of society; so, too, are all citizens and their different organizations—political or otherwise. We need to highlight that the sense of dislocation, of being overwhelmed by forces out of our control and comprehension, may be partially redressed by exploring more carefully the analytic tools that we employ at the moment of judging what is going on. The crucial point is not the analysis *per se*, but the orientation that it furnishes for our praxis.

A mere theological approach to this new phenomenon may provide inspiring values and a new horizon against which to assess this new direction that the history of our nations and peoples is taking—or compelled to take. Yet, inspiring as this may be, it would be rather ineffective if it were devoid of a

crucial step, that is, a methodical effort to study and disclose all the layers and ramifications of this complex matter. Through this we may discover that what we call globalization is neither paradise nor hell, but more likely a multifaceted process that is not simply imposed from above, or from outside—but is also longed for from below, and from within. Some of its faces seem so promising, so seductive, while others seem so destructive and repelling. What are the different faces that make up the process of globalization? Can we identify different, overlapping spheres contained within this phenomenon, some of them—for example, the economic one—seeking to dominate over the others? Are not some of the spheres quite promising and not devoid of a religious aura (such as communications, global travel, cultural exchange, and international networking) while others are quite menacing and troublesome (transnational companies, downsizing of states, ecological damage)? What could the “points of entry” into this process be and what would the different strategies to “come out” of it be? And, finally, how can the different identities that make up the Indian nation be strengthened—rather than weakened—in this process?

I believe that we must approach these questions not only because of the sober belief that our churches could greatly contribute to Indian culture and social processes but also because the inroads of globalization are sustained by claims that are only too familiar in terms of the Christian ethos, namely, universality, catholicity, unity. In what sense can we speak of a “family resemblance” among these terms? Can we relate to it positively and critically at the same time? This is a perfect opportunity to test again the boundaries of our theology of the cross, that is, to name things as they really are without falling into a destructive despair. As we freely uncover the negative dimensions of globalization at the same time we seek to discern the loving, and for that matter, hidden presence of God in the midst of this process.

Africa

A Tanzanian Experience: The Vicissitudes of an Elusive Tapestry

Else Marie Wiberg Pedersen and Vitor Westhelle

Coming to Africa is moving into another, very special rhythm of life. It is entering a setting of joyous dancing and singing accompanied by the rhythm of drums in the African night. It is entering a vast landscape where a rich variety of animals, birds, and flowers forms the colorful tapestry of the day. It is entering a continent in which corporate living, the Ujamaa, the sharing of life, the belonging to a specific group, most often tribal, mean everything. It is a continent where a holistic outlook on life and the idea of being a household or family permeates society and the church. Yet, at the same time, it is a continent characterized by major tensions and deep cleavages. Africa is above all a reflection of unity in diversity.

On the road from Nairobi to Moshi visitors get an immediate look into that diversity and some of those tensions. Driving on a road that every now and then threatens to disappear, on a shuttle bus that at times appears to rumble off road, one realizes how difficult it is to build a solid, efficient infrastructure. Efforts toward such are constantly undermined by the powers of nature and the lack of money. The route through the huge savannah is a show window of how traditional African and modern Western practices collide. Small reddish dots on the horizon eventually turn into Masais tacitly tending their lean cattle, majestically crossing the asphalt road, while totally ignoring passing cars. Here and there small enclaves of straw huts flanked by a tin shack are furnished with the clearest sign of globalization: "Coca-Cola."

Nonetheless, it is the promise of Mount Kilimanjaro that becomes the distinctive mark of our meeting in Africa. Staying in friendly and beautiful surroundings at the foot of Africa's highest mountain, we constantly try to catch a glimpse of its splendor, of which we had heard and read so much. Enveloped in mist, this disappearing giant stands as a reality that seems to be but an illusion—like the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. We believe it to be there but can hardly point to its manifestation. Only once or twice do we succeed, when it suddenly and momentarily emerges out of its usual invisibility. Similarly, we have glimpses of how the church in Africa is seeking to live out the communion reality reflecting the Triune God, while combating the difficulties and obstacles that blur its vision.

Africa faces mountains of challenges. Towering among them is the AIDS/HIV epidemic, which has claimed (mostly in the sub-Saharan region) 80 percent of all AIDS victims worldwide. This is a demographic catastrophe whose impact on the traditional tribal and familial structures is devastating and has drastic implications for just about every aspect of life. However, until very recently—and in part this is the case until today—its proportions and growing rate of infection have been concealed by a mist of misinformation, suspicion, and superstition. Due to its cataclysmic proportions and the very limited resources available to deal with the challenge, the consequences of the epidemic put a tremendous strain on areas of healthcare that otherwise could be more efficiently handled. In this context, the significant lack of resources, a deficient infrastructure to face the dimensions of these problems, and the gigantic foreign debt of the African nations call for an urgent international response.

The proverbial communal life of the African people (see Owdenburg M. Mdegella, "An African Understanding of Communion") offers us a peculiar and informative entry into some deep-rooted anthropological bases for an *ecclesial koinonia*. These include its horizontal sharing of responsibilities, coupled with a vertical respect for traditions and a recognition of one's proper place within community structures. The adage, "It takes a village to raise a child," attests to the primacy of the community in defining the identity of its individuals. Needless to say, such a concept stands in sharp contrast to the prevailing individualism in the modern Western world.

However, it is the same profound sense of communal life that has been linked to profound tribal strife. Such a situation that in extreme cases has led to genocide is certainly not unrelated to the sequels to European colonialism in politics and to the work of missionaries in the formation of the African churches. As a result, communal life has often been ossified in administrative apparatuses and hierarchical organizations, which were inherited from the colonial and missionary past and served to draw the old traditions of tribal life into a new but alien regimental chart.

Added to the missionary ventures of the past (and in some cases still in the present) is the success that Islam is having in spreading its faith on the east and west coasts, moving at a steady pace from north to south. While the achievements of Islam, with its devout militant strategies of conversion, have created tensions with the Christian churches, they have also called the churches to respond to the challenges presented by a competing world religion—as opposed to African Traditional Religion that Christianity had largely conquered.

But in all of these tensions and cleavages one finds an amazing vitality of the churches at the grassroots: the crowded Sunday services; the leadership role of the laity with the elders at the center of the life of the congregation; the impressive social and educational work provided for the disenfranchised; the spiritual nurturing and empowerment of a suffering people. All of this and

much more have made of African churches beacons of hope against all hope. The old and precious tradition in Northern Africa, reaching back to the early church, contrasts with the rather recent past in the sub-Saharan region, providing for a complex yet promising picture of its reality.

The vastness of the African continent, riven by so many divisions, the elusive grandeur of its highest mountain concealed in the mist of spring, are to the eyes of unaccustomed visitors symbols of reality of an Africa gigantic in its challenges and intangible in its dimensions. Yet, like the elusive Kilimanjaro, its presence is felt even when it defies the senses.

The Contextualization of Church as a Communion

Cuthbert K. Omari

The church as a communion is a society within society. It can be differentiated from other social groups mainly by its confessed faith, system of beliefs, structures, and sometimes practices. In this respect, there are certain expectations on how the communion can react to specific issues and social problems.

In a country such as Tanzania, where the church has been known for more than one century now, it is a recognized force in society. Both the government and other religious groups recognize the existence of the church and the various roles it plays in Tanzanian society.¹ There has, at times, been conflict between the government and the churches on the nationalization of social services such as schools and hospitals hitherto owned and controlled by the churches. Due to the state's inability to manage the social services it had nationalized in the 1960s and 1970s the churches have been called upon to help manage these services. The church is likened to a partner in development in this regard.

In this essay the concepts of communion, community, and society are developed from a sociological perspective. In the following section, some theological terms and concepts are analyzed to make them relevant to the local situation.

The Lutheran church, with its two million members, is the second largest Christian communion in Tanzania, after the Roman Catholic church. It is federal in nature with about 20 different dioceses scattered all over the country. Its headquarters are in Arusha, Northern Tanzania, and it is structured in dioceses with an episcopacy leadership model.

It sees itself as a community of believers, but this is more self-perception than as perceived by others, non-Christians. These believers have been united by faith which they proclaim every Sunday, whether they understand what it means or not. In sociological terms, those who form a community must have specific characteristics to be considered as being united or having the same objectives and hence a recognized entity. This applies to the church as a community of believers too.

First, they must have a common factor or factors which unite them. This is something that binds them as a group, gives meaning to their existence and a sense of direction. The bond that unites the members gives them the power to proclaim themselves as one entity.

¹ C.K. Omari (ed.), *Essays on Church and Society in Tanzania* (Soni: Vulga Press, 1976).

Second, the community must be functional. Jassy observes basic community as "the focus for personal and permanent relationships between individuals, the point to which their integration into society as a whole takes place."²

The believers in the community must in their membership find the meaning of life. There must be dynamism that makes life in that community worth living. In other words, the community of believers must be a dynamic and functional entity.

The church is actively engaged in *diaconia* and identified as a social unit with responsibilities through discipleship and service. Because of the various ways in which it discharges its duties and responsibilities, the greater society recognizes it as a vital and social organization whose mission it is to serve society.

Sometimes certain segments of society and even church members misunderstand the church's role simply because some of the activities it carries out are associated with the traditional missionary methodology of conversion. In Tanzania, where before independence in 1961³ social services such as education and health were mostly in the hands of Christian missionaries, some groups still mistake them for yet another form of Christian missionary activity. As a result, some people have interpreted the dispensing of such services negatively, accusing the government of favoring Christians. Furthermore, it has been claimed by some that since such institutions had previously been used to convert people, leading to "rice Christians," it might be the same today.

Such allegations were taken seriously by the government after independence, resulting in the nationalization of schools in 1969 and the takeover of mission hospitals in the 1970s. The goal was to normalize the situation and provide everyone accessibility to the social services without discrimination. Since the government now is unable to run such institutions and social services efficiently and productively, it has asked the churches to participate fully in the delivery of social services. The churches have taken the challenge seriously. Many institutions of higher learning, mainly from post-primary to university education, have been established. The Lutheran church in Tanzania has recently established its own university, Tumaini University, which encompasses various colleges, including the Kilimanjaro Medical Center as a School of Medicine. Similar initiatives are taken by the Roman Catholics and the Adventists.

To the Christian church the situation is a challenge, for it is beyond being a disciple and a servant. Some non-Christian Tanzanians, who happen to have no such vision, are likely to grumble that Christians are being favored, an

² M. Perrin Jassy, *Basic Community in African Churches* (New York: Orbis, 1973), p. 247.

³ Omari, *op. cit.*, (note 1).

allegation which is untrue for the following reasons. The established institutions serve Tanzanian society, regardless of color, creed, and even social background. They are part of the Tanzanian government's wider call for non-governmental organizations and private groups or individuals to come out and to help participate in the development of the people of Tanzania. And, they are not used for missionary activities but provide social services that serve the people of Tanzania.

This is how the Tanzanian churches regard the roles and functions of such institutions. They see the opportunity to serve the people of Tanzania.

The Christian churches in Tanzania, mainly the Roman Catholic and the Lutheran churches, responded to the challenge of serving Tanzanian society in different ways. In collaboration with their partners in the North, they established the Christian Social Service Commission (CSCS) which manages the externally available resources for health and education. Education and health, for instance, are areas that have been affected negatively as a result of the economic crisis, which Tanzania has been facing since the late 1970s. Partners from the North, mainly churches from Germany, are channeling funds to various programs and projects which are non-discriminatory in nature. Both Christians and non-Christians benefit from such initiatives.

Water projects, training, and empowerment of women and men are a part of the church's initiatives to respond to the current challenges. Various dioceses and congregations are engaged in the provision of assistance to different population groups in a bid to promote their development. So as a whole the churches are very active and heavily involved in the providing of social services. The central focus is people's development and service. The Lutheran church has established an office dealing with development issues, which various dioceses have replicated at the local level.

The Lutheran church in Tanzania has for a long time been involved in programs to strengthen democracy. This has been in response to its role in advocacy for good governance and the right to participate in social issues that touch people. The development of a mature civil society in matters related to democracy is a continuous undertaking.

With its programs for democracy the Lutheran church in Tanzania has not only participated in the struggle for the development of the Tanzanians' well-being. In addition many projects have been accomplished through its Development Projects Office. Various dioceses have now established development offices to handle developmental issues and problems at the grassroots level. Such offices serve people of different faiths. Other churches have similar institutions and programs such as Caritas (which is Roman Catholic) that are carrying out the same type of activities.

Since independence, Tanzania has opened its doors to refugees from several African countries and invited them to settle. It made its soil a sanctuary for many of the liberation movements in Southern Africa. The number of refugees

peaked in 1994 with 700,000 refugees in Tanzania, mainly from Burundi and Rwanda. While the majority of the first refugees came from Southern Africa, after Zimbabwe, Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, and South Africa gained their independence, the big influx of refugees came from the inter-lacustrine kingdom.

At the request of the Tanzanian government, the Lutheran World Federation's (LWF) Department for World Service in 1964 established on behalf of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and in consultation with the Christian Council of Tanzania (CCT) the Tanganyika Christian Refugee Service (TCRS) in order to cope with the ever increasing number of refugees. TCRS was also a response to the requests for assistance from constituent member churches of the CCT. TCRS is run in cooperation with the state. For the past 30 years or so, TCRS has become a symbol of the way in which the church can respond to societal issues. TCRS is an example of how the LWF responded to the sociopolitical crisis in Africa. It shows how the church can, at different levels, respond to specific social issues in time and space. It is part of its missionary vision and role.

Whatever mass media is used to educate people on special issues, the church is carrying out its social ministry and as such it is identified as an institution responsible for certain programs dealing with special issues or problems.

Please find below a list of other more ecumenical issues:

Fellowship and prayer groups: These gatherings transcend denominational boundaries. They are not churches, for their members are always members of their original churches. These are mainly found among the mainstream non-Roman Catholic churches.

Open-air preaching: Sometimes known as crusades, these are organized ecumenically and preached openly. They are sometimes dominated by "born again" and fundamentalist organizations, though other Christians also participate.

Easter procession: Sometimes ecumenical groups, mainly in urban areas, have organized an Easter march. It is no longer as strong as it used to be. Students in various post-primary institutions have been organizing their Easter conferences known as Student Christian Fellowship meetings which are ecumenical.

The church as a communion is recognized at the local level as an institution that deals not only with matters related to faith but also with social issues. Some of its attributes are known to the believers while others are not, depending on the place and space it occupies in society. Preaching takes a central place in the life of the church while social service delivery is considered as a part of its missionary activities. Some of them are undertaken ecumenically while others are operated along denominational lines.

The Main Characteristics of the Church in Tanzania

Owdenburg M. Mdegella

Over a century, the Lutheran church in Tanzania has been characterized by three inseparable aspects, namely the spiritual, the educational, and health care. Research has shown that right from the beginning, the Lutheran church was regarded as a community of people who meet regularly to learn how to read, count, and write and then to opt for or against baptism. There has always been a dispensary where people can receive medical attention close to their meeting place. The Lutheran church in Tanzania has always been understood as standing for the three Cs: class, clinic, and cross. These days it has added another C, namely, community.

Seven Main Characteristics

On the basis of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania's (ELCT) constitution as well as that of the dioceses and various units, the reports of the presiding bishops over the past 35 years, participation in leadership and decision making, and most of all academic research, I conclude that the ELCT's self-understanding has seven main characteristics.

1. *A communion of saints called from former religious beliefs* (normally African Religion and Islam) through the message of salvation based on the cross of Christ and converted to faith in God that we may worship the true living God through Jesus Christ as a communion of saints. This implies undertaking activities that focus our attention and energy towards God and to proclaim the word and to praise God freely, with all cultural expressions, while practicing the administration of proper sacraments accompanied by singing, thanksgiving, adoration, prayer, and supplication. Observations show that such activities are undertaken in all places starting from a congregation under a tree, classrooms, homes, tree or mud-wall, and grass-thatched huts, normal small-sized and medium-sized rectangular church buildings, as well as huge buildings of varied designs and decorations, all to the glory of God.

2. *A community of believers called to evangelize*. This implies a conglomeration of adherents to the faith in the crucified and resurrected Christ, called to witness by undertaking activities which draw other people to and from the church, centrifugally and centripetally into relationship with Jesus Christ in order to comply to the commission of Christ by carrying out God's mission (*missio Dei*). This is done through the kind of life our members lead

in the community as well as witnessing by outreach, visitation, and dialogue, with the understanding that no one comes to Christ alone.

3. *A communion of saints called for handing over our faith and nurturing our offspring and new believers by edification.* This entails undertaking activities, which build the body of Christ. Such activities include Bible studies, Christian and religious education to individuals and groups so that they can grow in faith and wisdom and mature to the service of Christ and society.

4. *A communion of saints called to render services which lead to the holistic liberation of humankind.* This call requires that the Lutheran church undertakes activities that bring relief and development leading to the well-being of ourselves and our fellow human beings. This call deals with service where the church focuses on the physical achievements such as education and medical services to all people regardless of creed, color, gender, and political persuasion.

5. *A community called to be prophets and advocates of society,* speaking out against evils in society, rebuking individual and collective practices of humiliation, correcting leaders of all categories in society and giving warning signals to society regarding symptoms of corruption, the violation of human rights, peace, and justice and to correct these ills.

6. *A community of servants called to practice charity.* This entails that the church look seriously into the community and make sure that the physically and mentally disabled or those less privileged are taken care of. This diaconic work seeks to respond to the neighbor in need through activities which bring relief to orphans, widows, the lame, the blind, the weak, the old, street children and others in need.

7. *A community of God's stewards call to protect and innovate nature.* This means participating in and encouraging activities that aim at the redemption of the whole of creation. This includes all endeavors and ethical teachings on the well-being of the immediate environment and ecology at large. This is why church leaders speak about reforestation and activities of that nature.

Tension between Parishes and Leaders

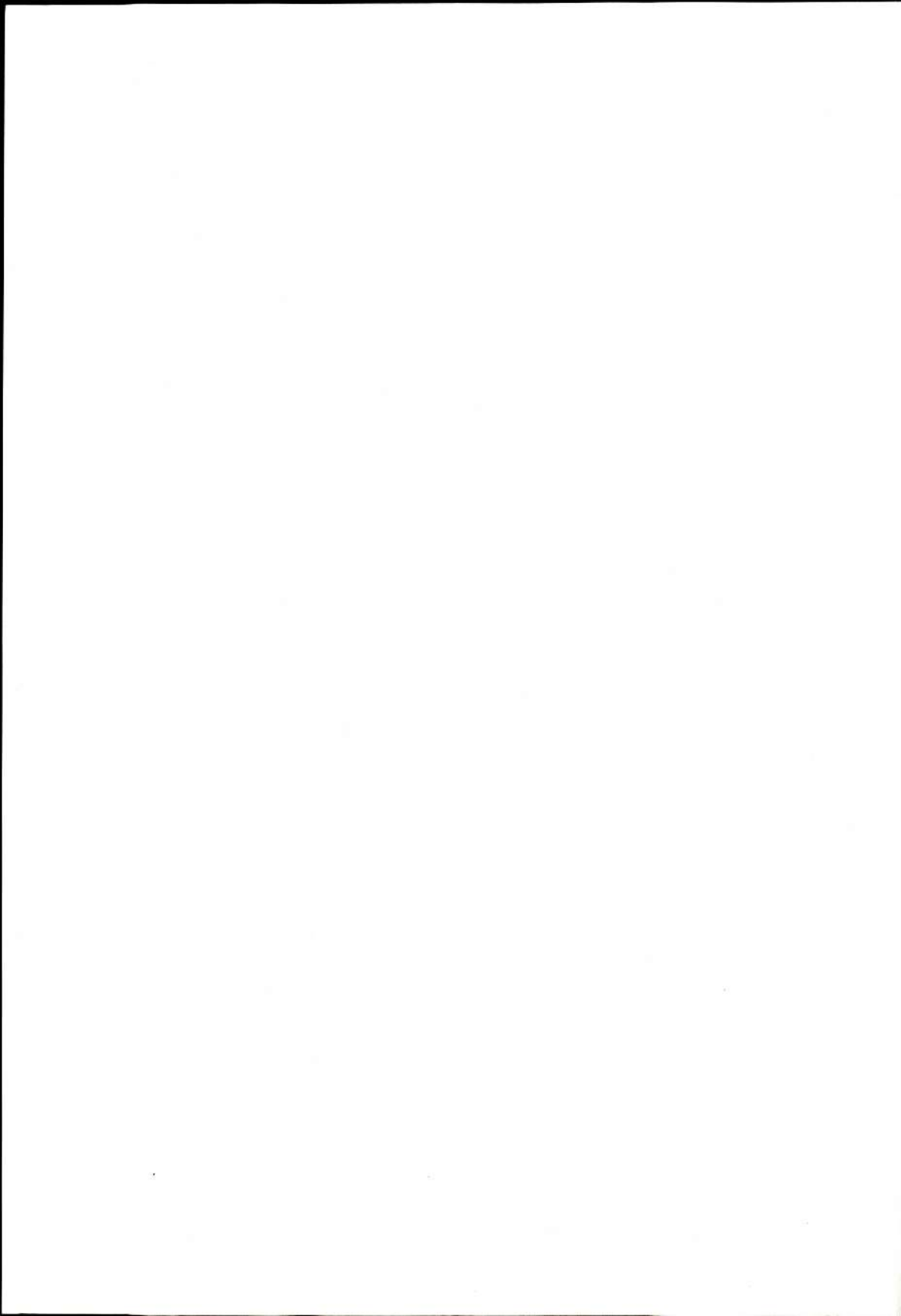
Society feels that, while the ELCT cherishes its unity, it also respects the autonomous aspects of the individual dioceses. The church is established on a tribal basis. With the exception of five, the 20 bishops of the dioceses (including me) have been elected on the basis that they belong to the dominant tribal groups. The five who do not belong to the tribal group of the areas in which they lead, are either people who have lived in the area for a long time and have been assimilated or are from the ELCT's former mission areas. This

simply means that the question of the ELCT as a communion in itself and in community is still unresolved.

Some critical remarks: These "poor" servants with low wages are building big houses, some have cars while others do not make a living from their wages. What I want to portray here is a tension between the members of true *koinonia*, between the "haves" and the "have nots." The aspect of sharing is very much spoken of, but there is not much sharing within the church community. The imbalance between income and actual life-style might also raise doubts regarding the accountability of those concerned. *Koinonia* can not be fully realized without proper *oikonomia*.

The ELCT views itself as a church that springs from the community. Every Lutheran Christian can evangelize and when three come together, they start a church under one of the parishes, or they might request for an evangelist or pastor. The ELCT is a church at the grassroots level. Its main functions are centered on the parish level. No diocese exists without the parishes and no parish exists without the congregations. Most of the decisions are centered around the parish council. The approach is two-way. All constitutions show that the top leadership should respect and deliberate on the opinions of the bottom leadership and bottom leadership shall obey the top authority. But what is the topmost authority? It is the synod that is comprised of more than 70 percent laity.

The tension between membership, ownership, and leadership of the church is latent and crucial. Most of the church members are women, most of the leaders, men. The church members own their churches through the legal procedures of the state, but most of them, especially the women who toil in most of the church activities, do not participate in the decision making.



An African Understanding of Communion

Owdenburg M. Mdegella

Communion

Communion is practiced among Africans during birth, circumcision, puberty, marriage, moaning, and burial ceremonies, as well as worship. At the birth of a child the whole extended family, relatives, and neighbors send gifts in kind. Close members of the family will then introduce the newborn to the departed. Circumcision and puberty rituals are a communion in the sense that they are some kind of a sacrament which could be compared to both baptism and confirmation. During these stages people are officially initiated into the community. They are taught how to be people in the community and in society. Such ceremonies do not pass without feasting together and being introduced to the rest of the community. It was at this stage that most of the youngsters were prepared both for war and marriage.

Marriage, moaning, and burial ceremonies are the stages where communion is practiced for a period of not less than three days. The Nyakyusa tribe take 10 days to 20 days. People bring food and drink. Relatives, friends, and neighbors rejoice in the case of marriage or comfort each other—crying, singing and dancing—in the case of death, and use the occasion for discussing issues of common interest.

The concept of communion in my African understanding starts with the verb “to be.” In Kihehe and Kibena it is the verb *kuvela*; in Kiswahili it is *kuwa*. These abstract terms can be heard in daily living and are always illustrated in sayings and proverbs, such as *Velage wi munu pa vanu*, which means “Be human, be what you are in the midst of people who know what they are. Be a person among people.” Communion is therefore the state of being within and among the ones who are being. The Oromo of Ethiopia and the Kipsigis of Kenya have this saying: “No matter how skinny, the son always belongs to the father.” The person in the community is a reality that makes a person to be in a communion. A person in a communion has an identity and self-understanding that is a reflection of the parents in the society. “I am because we are; we are because I am.” The Swazi say, “It is through people that we are people.” The Tumbuka of Malawi say, “There is always a room for the person you love even if the house is crowded.”

Community

Koinonia or communion can be described as *Ujamaa*, which means practicing the spirit of the community. While community is *Jamaa*, *Ujamaa* is "community-ship."

Ukoo (Swahili) is clan in English: the uniting force of blood related people in an extended family. The sense of belonging. Sayings related to a clan are: "The hen with chicks doesn't swallow the worm." "When a woman is hungry she says: 'Roast something for the children that they may eat'." "One knee does not bring a child or one hand does not nurse a child." "It takes a village to raise a child." "One finger does not kill a louse." "Two hands wash each other." "Many sticks burn together." "Many beads form one necklace." "Many bells on the legs make a loud sound." "One person is thin gruel; two or three people are a handful of stiff cooked corn meal."

Society

Society is the inclusive aspect that forms a bigger set other than the community and the communion. It takes groups such as tribes, sects, behavioral patterns, state, race, or a religious group.

The Church - A Blessed Institution? Critical Reflections

Anna Mghwira

If God in Jesus Christ claims space in the world, even though it will be only a stable, because there was no room in the inn ... then ... he comprises the whole reality of the world and so too the church of Jesus Christ is the place ... at which his reign ... is evidenced and proclaimed. This space is not something which exists on its own account ... but something which reaches out far beyond itself, for it is not the space of some kind of cultural association such as would have to fight for its own survival in the world, but it is the place where testimony is given The church is the place where testimony and serious thought is given or God's reconciliation of the world with himself in Christ, The space of the church is not there in order to try to deprive the world of a piece of its territory, but in order to prove to the world that it is still the world, which is loved by God and reconciled with him. The church has neither the wish nor the obligation to extend its space to cover the space of the world. It asks for no more space than it needs for the purpose of serving the world by becoming witness to Jesus Christ and to the reconciliation of the world with God through him. The only way in which the church can defend its own territory is by fighting, not for it, but for the salvation of the world. Otherwise, the church becomes a "religious society" which fights in its own interest and thereby ceases at once to be the church of God and of the world.¹

Luther would agree with Bonhoeffer, because also he was determined that a proper social theology would guide the church back into its historic purpose.

The church carries a twofold identity: first, it is the community of the believing community. It is a group transcending denominational boundaries, tribes, and ethnic groups, clergy and lay, men and women, children and elders. It is a wider Christian community, the church of God with people witnessing Christ as Savior and Lord of their lives. The second is the small church community, which while being part of the wider community claims an autonomy of its own. This then is the Lutheran church, a group of people who confess Christ and who identify themselves as of being Lutheran. But in essence we are all Christians just as Luther was.

The Lutheran understanding of itself is a partial understanding of the church as a whole which needs not be overemphasized here but for the fact that people experience in their daily lives, whether the church moves with them or not.

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (New York: Macmillan, 1964), p. 202.

In this context, the church as a global institution bears much of the historical events, which have contributed to this understanding. Therefore, the church has been a part of exploitation and destruction of peoples while being a deliverer of the message of salvation to the same people, liberating and supporting human efforts to reclaim the integrity of creation and abundance of life in Jesus Christ.

In many ways, the ministry of the church, like that of the state, is a result of an external imposition or influence. In many instances, the church imitates practices and traditions that have no biblical orientation whatsoever. Nonetheless these carry an authority assumed to be Christian, because of those persons who introduced them. At this level, the church is challenged to preach the gospel of Christ—which is opposed to traditional gospels. Often the theory of the church contradicted its practice.

To cite a few examples from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania (ELCT), what I can call self-understanding is in many ways a traditional, tribal, ethnical understanding. Most of our dioceses are divided along tribal, ethnical, and traditional lines. Employment opportunities and other contracts are offered to members of certain families based on these same grounds and the head office comprises representatives with these same qualifications. Apart from these, the church as a whole has formed for itself a sense of a big family with small clans.

According to this view, the church's self-understanding is basically locally located, but internationally structured. Every diocese has a sister diocese in Europe and America for financial and moral support. Nevertheless, the support is essentially financial and resources continue to flow from the North to the South. This perpetuates a certain colonial mentality amidst global international injustice expressed through international institutions which benefit the North, Christians and non-Christians alike, and are to the detriment of Christians and non-Christians in the South.

The self-understanding is also social, political, cultural, religious, and economic. Christianity and the influence of Christians have had a strong impact on the lives of individuals and communities. In certain situations, the young generation may not understand how the old generation embraced Christianity wholesale irrespective of intentions that are not part of the Christian faith, but are mainly traditional. Moreover, for allowing foreign missionaries to brainwash people and making them objects of traditional missionary influence and totally to disregard African traditions, practices, and ways of life. This has distorted, in various ways, the self-understanding of the church in many African communities.

This distortion has not stopped; rather, it has increased and is quickly widening. The distinctive characteristic of a church in an African context is becoming a superficial impression, not an object of faith; a convictional ground for one being African and Christian. This raises the need to examine the fu-

ture of a Christian society which grows in such ambiguity, because self-understanding and communion has to do with the future of humanity, with survival and quality of life.² Our theologizing in a historical-social context favorable to delivering the message of Christ is hereby challenged and put to task to allow Christ's message to reach people where they are with what they have and what they are striving to achieve constructively, with the ability to choose and select.

The self-understanding of the church is also looked upon by Christians and others through the eyes of the institutional church, the official understanding of church operations and functions.

Luther was very clear about the institutional church and its role to the believing community: that it is an institution, not an order of faith (as a theological *locus*), dividing communions instead of uniting them. Thus there is a difference between a minister and his ministerial functions, between a messenger and the message, and the content of the message is to be contextually examined.

We could refer to Jesus' ministry, his life, work, and violent death, because he was not diplomatic concerning conflicts of his time. He died a violent death: a crucifixion. A church that is not afraid of discipleship finds itself in a similar situation. It suffers from the breaches in society, cannot escape them, and becomes vulnerable.³ In the context of Christ's death, the cross was a weakness, a shame, yet a glorious death, victory over death on resurrection. Jesus created a scandal, which he was able to overcome. Nevertheless, the church as an institution cannot take the place of society and substitute allegedly divine structures for human ones. Therefore, it needs healing, reconciliation, and renewal.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) rates Tanzania as among the leading least-developed poorer countries. The low level of development in Tanzania renders the church to a much lower level of development if it depends on the development level of the members—both in the church as believers and in the community at large. The low level of development can be categorized in the provision of social services, education, health, and infrastructure. Although the church works hard to promote a better provision of these services, it is absolutely minimal compared to the needs of the population. Moreover, only very few people can afford to pay for such services, and so its impact remains only to the classical division between the "haves" and "have-nots".

In the developed countries, most social services are a domain of the state. Churches and other institutions provide such services privately, as a supple-

² Gottfried Brakemeier, "Communion in Christ," *LWF Documentation No. 36* (Geneva: LWF, 1995), pp. 17f.

³ *Ibid.*

ment to state efforts. Due to institutional low capacity, low motivation, and lack of insight and commitment, the state under *Ujamaa* [practicing community] failed to deliver what it had promised. Worse, it made people participate in a privatized cost sharing experiment.

The low level of development in the poor countries is coupled with a weak civil society. Leaders in most poor countries are not accountable to their constituencies because of the weakness of the civil society. Our politicians talk sense to their constituencies when they seek to be elected to leadership positions. This is the same in the state as in the church. Therefore, arrogance and the legitimization of election results are enforced through threats to a society, which is poor, ignorant, dependent, and enslaved by closed, undemocratic systems. Both the state and the church are blessed institutions, accepted generally even in their incompetence. As a blessed institution, the church too could legitimate injustice and violence and can sometimes act as an accomplice to the same.

Therefore, it is the church's duty to make sure that people do not live in ignorance and poverty, if they are to experience full liberation.

It is important that as a church we put more effort into empowering people in all aspects that concern their lives. In doing so, no one will be left aside. Women too will be included and counted equally as full members. Gender relations will be indicative of the level of development. So far, women in most African societies live in abject poverty, rejection, and discrimination, be they educated or illiterate. The patriarchal order behaves in a demonic manner in relation to the female gender, refusing it a life worth a human standard.

The ELCT has improved its policy in so far as women ministries are concerned. Most dioceses (except Bukoba and Karagwe) have accepted the ordination of women and ministry at congregational level, allowing women's talents and gifts to be shared by the whole people of God. What remains, however, is the level of acceptance and recognition and there are serious shortcomings in the relations between men and women.

Our society in Africa has been a battleground for many years now. Although Tanzania claims in political terms to be a peaceful, stable country, this is true only for some parts of this country. The majority of poor of this land cannot make a similar claim. A country with such a weak civil society has no reason to boast of peace and stability.

The level of corruption in high offices is but a manifestation of a systematically legitimized violence against the majority. It is a cause of deep concern when the government is formed by Christians as majority government leadership, leave alone the church office. It implies to me that the church (individual Christians in public offices) is a leading corrupter, having failed to produce Christians who are bound by love and justice as the highest commandment in public service. One wonders if the church as an institution of people born and brought up here is not corrupt.

It is true that the church seems to be active in public affairs, monitoring elections, providing social services, condemning injustice, and so on. Yet, while it might be doing so at the grassroots level it fails to address the root causes of such practices and, therefore, not getting the expected results.

An allegedly peaceful country such as Tanzania could be exemplary in terms of its economy, political mobilization, the awareness of civil society, institutional capacities, and a stable attitude towards policy making. So far Tanzania has been on a laboratory leave for 40 years. Not one single policy has proved sustainable, feasible, and applicable as a well-envisioned approach to development. Those who make such policies are really at large, and since they serve institutions that are blessed by the Lutheran church, they legitimate the violence hidden in the unspoken cries of God's people. In this the church's message becomes a false prophecy, a lie of the land.

Transparency, accountability, and democracy are not evident in our society. Natural disasters and the lack of an adequate infrastructure to respond to such situations causes unpredicted hopelessness. All in all, an African lives in hope of a better future, bound to nature, land, and the environment which face the challenge of being destroyed without mercy.

The self-understanding of the church is an important factor and indicator for the development of the church and society. The fact that often the practice of the church contradicts its very theory, demands the reform of the systems and philosophy that guide the church. The church's involvement in social, political, and economic affairs has been positive; what is needed, however, is a joint action by the churches, government, and non-governmental organizations in the provision of social services. If possible, the church should find ways of participating in large infrastructure ventures. But because this is normally the responsibility of the state, churches should at occasional consultations remind the government of its duty.

The size of the population is both a challenge and an opportunity. A lot of wealth lies in every corner of the country which churches could tap and use in order to develop the poorer sections of our society.

The self-understanding has a theological basis, which should not be forgotten in every step we take. Bible readings, hymns, and Christian gatherings have always kept the Christian family together and this should be emphasized. The church should also open its doors to listen to issues on which people and Christians have strong feelings, what worries them, what makes them sad, angry, or hopeful, especially now when societies are experiencing critical changes in all spheres and aspects of life.

The self-understanding of the church is a total, holistic approach comprising members of the church and non-members or neighbors. Our role to these others is crucial for the witness of the church. It is expected that people who know themselves better, know others in the same way. What do we know and understand of ourselves as a church?

The Church in Ethiopia

Solomon Endashaw

The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) is one of the national churches in Ethiopia, and a member of All Africa Council of Churches (AACC), the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), and the World Council of Churches (WCC). Established in 1959 with a total membership of 20,000, today it counts a total of 2.3 million members. This growth testifies to the fact that it is a fast growing church.

The EECMY has 10 synods, two presbyteries, and two area works which are trying to become synods. Statistics from 1997 give EECMY 4,041 established congregations and 1,935 preaching places with 528 pastors, 1,240 evangelists, 104,347 volunteers, and 147 expatriates, functioning in the 14 regional states of Ethiopia.

As its name implies, EECMY understands itself as evangelical and confessional. It views itself as evangelistic and socially activist, responsible for preaching the saving Word of God as well as attending to the socio-economic and environmental needs of the communities in which it finds itself. The 1987 EECMY statement, entitled "EECMY-Reflection on the Interrelation between Proclamation of the Gospel and Human Development," tried to formulate some reflections. In this statement, EECMY affirmed its intention to be both Ethiopian and evangelical. Ethiopian is understood as the national, multicultural, socio-economical context; evangelical as the gospel-originated and gospel-related context, the obligation and responsibility to proclaim the Good News in word and deed to the whole person.

Furthermore, EECMY understands itself as a model for democracy. EECMY feels responsible for attending to society's well-being, harmonious relationships, and evangelization. At a practical level it reaches out to the poor through its social services, providing a setting where the poor have a chance to influence their development. This is how it sees itself and how society understands it.

What Sets EECMY Apart

Some of the distinctive characteristics of the EECMY can be listed as follows:

- *A strong tradition of lay leadership:* Anyone who observes the yearly statistics of this church can easily verify this. Those 1997 numbers quoted

earlier indicate close to 6,000 congregations and preaching places. The number of full-time pastors and evangelists, including expatriates, is under 1,800. The more than 104,000 volunteers are covering the greater portion of the ministry. The church had been led by lay presidents throughout its existence until 1993, when a pastor became president. Episcopacy is still not practiced. This tradition of lay leadership has enabled the church to continue preaching and witnessing to the Lord in difficult times during the Italian colonization, occupation and the revolution, when its pastors and evangelists were not able to do their jobs. Lay people have an equal voice in decision-making processes and elections.

- *Its policy to serve the whole person.* Thus "holistic ministry" is one of the its distinctive characteristics. In 1972 it announced through the LWF to all member churches, partners, and agencies that its policy is to serve the. For different reasons the issues raised then remain unchanged. Since 1992, the church has been active in disseminating the concepts of holistic ministry in all its units up to the level of parish. The church has still a lot to do to reach the congregational level in order to make its motto more practical.
- *It is ecumenically active and forward thinking,* and played a considerable role in initiating ecumenical conferences which have gradually developed into a big organization which is today called "Ethiopian Evangelical Churches Fellowship," and functions nationally. The formation of the Joint Relief Partnership (JRP) is another ecumenical initiative. It cooperates with the Orthodox and Catholic churches of Ethiopia in relief services.
- *Its steady, fast growth.* As we have already seen, the church has grown to 2.3 million members today from 20,000 members at its establishment in 1959.

How Others View the EECMY

Society holds various, in some cases, controversial views of the EECMY. In societies where the majority are Ethiopian Orthodox, it is viewed as a foreigner, not rooted in the country, as a heretic and antimary church. Orthodox priests preach about it in such a way as to stop their believers from joining the EECMY. Some people say that Orthodox communities view the EECMY as a politically oriented church that sides with the non-Amhara ethnic groups.

The poor and needy see it as an organization that has an answer to their problems. People in immediate need, such as refugees and displaced people, come to the church office for solutions. The church's relief and development activities during certain periods has led the community to view it as a rich, holy, and kind mother, whose wealth would alleviate their problems. Generally, the church is viewed as being concerned for the well-being of society and is therefore accepted by many. It is for this reason that non-believers and

other denominations including Muslims willingly contributed considerably to fund-raising campaigns for the construction of synod offices and congregations' buildings in some western and southern areas of the country. Someone said, "the society views her more than what she is." In general, society regards the EECMY as a strong and promising church but there are some misconceptions about the strength of the church.

Generally speaking the government has mistrusted the EECMY. The Haile Salassie regime (1930-1974) viewed it as a challenge and threat that awakened the people. The Derg regime viewed it as a foe of its Communist ideology with ties to anti-Communist countries. (At no time did the church ally itself with the existing government but tried to remain neutral in order to accomplish its ministry. Its neutrality has cost it a lot.)

Members regard the church as a place where they worship the Lord, serve the needy ones around them, and have fellowship with brothers and sisters across cultural and geographical boundaries. They see it as a church that takes up the mandate of evangelization to Ethiopia and beyond. Therefore, in most of the areas, evangelistic outreach is carried out by volunteers. The members' perception of the practice of the church is more or less in line with its official self-understanding. For many, membership in the EECMY gives them a strong feeling of communion with communities of the same belief in other parts of the world, whether in Africa or Europe or the Americas.

What Tensions it Experiences

Causes for the tensions the EECMY faces are many. They include its structure, which is now under study; inconsistent government policies; shortage of trained staff; the socio-economic situation of the country; war; social crisis; and the general poverty of the country.

The following are examples of the tensions between its official self-understanding and its *modus operandi*.

- Between its understanding of and belief in integration and the inseparability of witness and service and its structure that separates the two.
- Between its policy to serve the whole person, and financial limitations that hinder it from practicing this.
- Between the growing indigenous image, and dependency on economic support from outside Ethiopia.
- Between fast numerical growth, and slow rate of self-support.
- Between the rural structure, and limited resources to sustain it.
- Between its belief in equal value of ministries (services) in the church, and unequal privileges of the clergy.

- Between the leadership's mandate to oversee, care for, and keep the flock in the congregations, and their failure to do so due to financial and other constraints.

Regarding the different ecclesiologies in the church and region, I personally perceive two opposing understandings of the church and its ministry. While there are some individuals who accept the EEMCY's policy that the church should serve the spiritual and physical needs of the human beings, there are other groups that do not understand this, claiming that the primary mission of the church should be evangelism only. According to my experience, some individuals, from other denominations, strongly oppose the development and other social services the church renders.

A proper understanding of communion is important. Such sharing establishes or strengthens the community of believers, which in turn constitutes a just society. Communion brings the people of God into unity and turns them into the same community, regardless of race, gender, geography, and other differences.

The church is striving to contribute to the alleviation of the above-mentioned social ills. With regard to political issues, the church is asking itself as to how far it can contribute positively and constructively while remaining neutral and without risk to itself. Civic education is being given to church leaders and workers of the church to enable them to live and serve as Christian stewards and responsible citizens. The church is in a dilemma in areas of practical involvement. It cannot withdraw from reality. As a church it believes that it should play a prophetic role, but the questions as to how to play it, and to what extent, have not got an answer.

Strengths and Weaknesses

One can sum up areas of achievement and areas of challenge facing the EECMY. The further course of action should be decided in consultation with the church leadership as a whole.

Strengths:

- Church members are aware of their social responsibility.
- The community trusts and credits the church.
- Collaboration with partners enabling the church to provide the services required.

Weaknesses:

- There are limited financial and human resources.
- The country's socio-economic conditions have a deep impact.

Relationships with Other Religious Communities

As far as the collaboration with other denominations and other religious organizations is concerned, the church has a deep relationship with the Ethiopian Orthodox (despite conflicts in some rural areas) and Catholic churches. The three churches have worked together during the severe famine in the northern part of the country and still run a joint program. They act together, meeting, and discussing and sometimes cooperating. Recently, these three churches joined by the Muslims discussed how to mediate the peaceful resolution of the Ethiopian-Eritrean border conflict.

The EECMY also plays a bridging role between the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and Pentecostals and other evangelical churches, using the trust and credit it has among them.

One can see some strengths and weaknesses in the EECMY's work with other groups. From that we can suggest improvements.

Strengths:

- The EECMY has the ability to work with all denominations.
- Mutual concern and good understanding exist between the EECMY and other denominations.
- The leadership of the various churches interact well together.

Weaknesses:

- The church members have not yet reached the level of mutual understanding as the leadership.
- The collaboration has not been well thought out and planned. Often, decisions taken on different issues are situation driven.
- Continuity is questionable or at least not predictable.

Additional model suggested: Although this still needs to be discussed the following suggestions can be made.

- The genuine commitment to ecumenical relations needs to be strengthened,
- Means have to be designed to bring the church members to ecumenical understanding through raising awareness and creating an atmosphere in which they can come together and work on some common issues.

The Global Dimension and Accountability

The EECMY belongs to world ecumenism, addresses social concerns through the AACC, the LWF and the WCC, and takes part in the joint actions of these groups. The EECMY addresses social issues through supporting and contributing to the advocacy roles of the ecumenical organizations.

Furthermore, it addresses the global dimension of these issues through praying and interceding on behalf of victims in Africa, Europe, Asia, and Latin America and the sharing of experiences and information.

With regard to accountability, churches in these communions can hold one another accountable by entering into a deeper commitment and being faithful to that. By reminding one another to be good and faithful stewards of the resources God has made available for them and their communities. Moreover to use these resources wisely not for themselves but for the needy.

The Church's Mission in Cameroon

Thomas Nyiwé

Starting from a sociological perspective implies beginning with the description of reality. In other words, we look at what is fundamentally determinant for the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon's (ELCC) self-understanding in the light of its own cultural setting. The ELCC is one particular church with its own members in a particular location. This particular church and its members stand together in their cultural setting before God, as the result of God's creation, redemption, and sanctification. As it moves progressively through its very short history, the ELCC does not travel alone; rather, it walks together with its members. There is, therefore, a close interrelationship between the ELCC and its members, and it is obvious that the ELCC is, because its members are, and because its members are, the ELCC really is. From an historical perspective one can rightly say that the ELCC is a real people on pilgrimage.

For over 75 years, since the arrival of first Lutheran missionaries from the USA in 1923 and from Norway in 1925, the Lutheran presence in Cameroon has been a reality. Furthermore, since its foundation in 1960, the ELCC has been steadily following its course through the turbulent events affecting the history of Cameroon's society.

Today's social reality of the ELCC helps us understand that people sometimes have ready-made concepts of the church which do not call for theological considerations or make it an object of faith. The concepts that people use to describe the ELCC's social reality are sometimes taken from the language of the social sciences. According to these concepts the church is an organization, a human society or a sociological phenomenon.

From such a sociological perspective, the ELCC might be considered as an organized aspect of social existence that is established and perpetuated by various norms and rules (convention and constitution). It is something that belongs to a certain category of people, just as a secular organization belongs to an interested group of people.

If people have this down-to-earth sociological conception of the church, as is sometimes the case in the ELCC, the church's major function might become the meeting of people's needs such as providing good education, good health care, and good jobs. This has historically been one of the ELCC's greatest contributions to the holistic development of Cameroonian society.

From the beginning, the ELCC took seriously the social context of those who were supposed to be evangelized. It created educational and health care

institutions as a means of promoting the rapid growth of the church. But little by little, these institutions became more important than the church itself.

The church was conceived as a means of assuring the welfare of individuals and the community at large. It has become difficult to start missionary work in a new area without promising to create a school or a dispensary. People need to see the immediate social implications of the ELCC's presence among them. People have become increasingly blind to the significance of the Christian faith in its inner sense as their efforts are oriented towards external results. They prefer that the preaching of the gospel to all people were replaced by secular *diaconia*, by social action and philanthropic service, in other words, catering for the non-religious needs of people. Far from being viewed as the vehicle of God's interactions with human society, the ELCC is sometimes seen merely as a functional means for the well-being of Cameroonian society.

It should be pointed out that at least 50 percent of the Gbaya people of Cameroon are Lutherans. The Christian faith spread rapidly among this great people since the inception of missionary preaching in the 1920s. Nowadays, being a Gbaya has become more or less synonymous with being a Lutheran. Even during the term of Cameroon's first president, when it was very difficult to be a Christian, the Gbaya people in the northern part of Cameroon, kept their faith. Some of those who had become Muslims under Islamic political pressure started later on to come back little by little, and whenever they did so, it was considered a victory for the Gbaya community since the phenomenon means coming back to the Gbaya community.

It also should be noted here that the ELCC is not only a church for the Gbaya people. The ELCC accomplishes its mission among 36 different tribal groups. God has called all these tribes through the preaching of God's Word and the water of baptism. It is God's miracle that these people of different tribal groups are altogether members of this unique church, the ELCC. It is an obvious example of the fact that when the Lord of the church is creatively at work through the Spirit, using his divine power to enable people who were enemies to transcend their animosity. Together they then can build a community where people will be accepted as they are without tribal considerations.

The ELCC is therefore characterized by tribal pluralism which makes it difficult for people who are not educated to engage in a fruitful conversation with their brothers and sisters who do not belong to their tribe. This greatly challenges the concept of communion at the practical level. Whether we like it or not people are first of all members of the church. The link between one Christian person and that person's tribal brother or sister is always stronger than the link with a Christian brother or sister. This is the reason why we always find churches that belong to tribal groups.

One of the most important characteristics of African society is wholeness. Nonetheless, the ELCC which belongs to this African society is also a church of which it is said that it is in the world, but does not belong to the world. The

ELCC and its members find themselves in a dialectical existential position, whereby they live in their own cultural setting with all that that implies while, at the same time, they are aware of the reality that they are made for God and not only for themselves. The ELCC, with its members, lives in the "waiting room," knowing what has already happened and what is yet to happen. But the waiting room is not only a resting place. The waiting room is also a context of authentic human existence. The church should not be blind to the need of its members while waiting for what is yet to come.

The ELCC understands itself as a gift from the Triune God. It is the Triune God who has created in this particular location of Africa a new situation through Jesus Christ. Prior to the missionary preaching about God's saving event, nobody knew what the church was. Now that people have the church they themselves are the church. They are nurtured by the gospel. Through the preaching of the church, they find forgiveness of sins, salvation, and eternal life. The church is the place to go when there is no other place to go to. The church is like that because behind the church stands somebody who is the head of the church: Jesus Christ. Therefore, the church takes seriously its presence among and with the people, because this presence is the real sacramental presence of the risen one who is God among his people, the people of the church.

The Relevance of the Church in Tanzania: A Reflection on Social Issues

Leonard Mbilinyi

Introduction: The Interim Mission and the Mission

The problems facing a poor country such as Tanzania are overwhelming. Like in any society, these problems affect members of the Tanzanian society in different ways. Some problems touch only certain groups, while others pose a threat to everyone. The weather phenomenon, El Niño, is a typical example of a problem which proved to be a threat to almost every Tanzanian, threatening the survival of individuals as well as their institutions. This includes the Tanzanian church as both a divine and a human institution.

Regardless of whatever threats the Tanzanian church is experiencing, people within and outside expect it to show itself to be the "salt" of Tanzanian society. This "saltiness" is seen when the church "administers caring and healing to the hurts of society." (Moltz) The hurts of Tanzanian society include such problems as child abuse, ignorance, disease, poverty, unemployment, violence, and drug abuse. These problems are denying the majority of Tanzanians the fullness of life as God intended them to experience.

The ability of this church to meet those social needs depends on three factors: (1) the extent of understanding its mission and calling; (2) its decision-making structure, which either helps or hinders it from making the salt available to the society it is called upon to serve; and (3) the quantity and quality of salt it possesses. The degree to which the church is capable of meeting societal needs determines the degree of its relevance in society. Relevance here represents not necessarily what the church is doing or trying to do, but what it ought to do. In the context of this paper, what the church is doing or trying to do is seen as an interim mission. When the church is doing, or attempting to do, what it ought to do, it is viewed as carrying out its mission.

In an ideal situation, we would expect to see what the church is doing, or trying to do, significantly to contribute to the realization of what it ought to do. It goes without saying that, "this cannot be the case at all times, and may, in fact, be true only rarely." (Miringoff) This rareness is evident when we look at our church's history from the missionary era to the present. The variation in adherence to the mission of the church being the salt of the earth stems from (1) a distorted notion of the church's mission expressed in the assumed rivalry between evangelism and social concern; (2) the utilization of authority in decision making which led the church to the adherence or non-adher-

ence to its mission and calling; and (3) effective or ineffective utilization of resources needed for the realization of its mission. It is my conviction that in using these factors as tools in our brief exploration we will be able to establish the degree of relevance of the church in Tanzania's history in relation to social issues.

From Where Have We Come? Holism and Social Issues

According to its constitution it is one of the purposes of the Lutheran Mission Cooperation, Tanzania (LMC) "to promote and sustain, by word and deed, the proclamation of the holistic Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ." What is this holistic gospel? How useful is it in our attempt to assess the saltiness of the church or its relevance in society? How does the internalization of this concept help the church adequately to respond to social issues?

The English word holistic comes from the Greek, *holos*, meaning whole, wholly or complete. In John 7:23, we read, "...why are you angry with me for healing the whole man" (New International Version). In another translation the word "complete" is used: "...why should I be condemned for making a man completely well" (New Living Translation). Other stronger forms of *holos* in Greek are *holokleria* and *holoteles*. *Holokleria* means integrity, completeness, and physical wholeness. *Holoteles* refers more to quality than quantity, it means "wholly and utterly, through and through, complete to the end." (Steward) In reference to *holokleria*, we read in Acts 3:16, "and the faith that is through Jesus has given him his perfect health in the presence of all of you." In 1 Thessalonians 5:23 it is written, "May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." This is a clear admonition to adopt a biblical holistic view that takes seriously the wholeness of humanity.

Social problems are indicators of where society is hurting. Hurting people need healing that will bring them to "wellness" spiritually, mentally, physically and socially. The church thinks of these people as worth its help because they are created in the image of God. In other words, human beings share the unique dignity and worth of their creator. Conditions, "such as abject poverty, certain diseases, torture, gross social injustice, and chronic hunger dehumanize people. They damage human personality and are an affront to human dignity." (Kinoti) These conditions impair the ability of people to experience the fullness of life as exemplified in the biblical notion of holism. The relevance of the church in any given society is seen when it enables the people of such a society to enjoy the wholeness of life. This life is experienced when the church makes a conscious effort to preserve the uniqueness of individuals in the communities it is serving. This is done by contextualizing the gospel to the real life situation of the people it serves.

The Missionary Church: Modern Theistic Worldview Versus Primal Worldview

The task of assessing the "saltiness" of the missionary church demands that we examine its understanding of a holistic gospel. David Livingstone plainly stated that his mission to Africa was to "...try to make an open path for commerce and Christianity." This open path to Tanzania and other countries as a result of Livingstone's work and that of others brought what Katoke has described as official and unofficial missionaries. To him, the official missionaries are the ones who came specifically to preach the gospel. The unofficial missionaries include "...fortune seekers, merchants, traders, adventurers, explorers, empire and colony seekers." These people by virtue of coming from "Christian" countries and claiming to be Christians preached the gospel to the people they came into contact with in their communities.

This gospel was preached utilizing a rescue mission model. The mission of the church was conceived so as to rescue Africans from their pagan way of life expressed in their values, customs, and culture. This was reflected in the establishment of schools, health centers, and other social-welfare service-related institutions in the so-called mission centers. These social programs were perceived as either creating opportunities for evangelism, or complementing evangelistic work. The church had not developed a theology that could adequately explain the role which social development work plays in Christ's redemptive work.

It is estimated that "ninety percent of all the converts in Tanzania was a direct result of evangelization in schools." The kind of education they received prepared them "to work as teachers in church schools, nurses in church dispensaries and hospitals and, as evangelists and clergymen. ...The question of self-employment was not raised." (Kijanga) Missionaries regarded schools as an evangelistic and a civilizing strategy. It was believed that, "only after the Africans had learned to read and write could they ...gain the knowledge and understanding necessary to become mature Christians and civilized men." (Lema) This education did not prepare young people to live and work in their communities. It was the complete opposite of traditional education, which was an integral part of life and work in communities. Cameron and Dodd described indigenous education this way:

[It was] a long life progress whereby a person progressed through predetermined stages of graduation from birth to death. It was vocational in that boys were prepared to become worriers as well as hunters, fishermen, or farmers, and the girls to perform domestic and agricultural duties with strong emphasis on their roles as future wives and mothers.

This conception that divided "evangelistic work" from "social development related work" was based on a Western worldview that "... separate the physical and spiritual dimensions of reality." (Bradshaw) The assumption here was,

evangelism affects the spiritual part of our being, while social development related activities affect the physical segment of our humanity. This modern theistic worldview held by a significant number of missionaries was contrary to the African primal worldview whom they were christianizing and civilizing. To Africans, the notion that one could divide reality between spiritual and physical was inconceivable. They believed that "the spiritual realm governs the behavior of the physical realm. Changes in the spiritual realm cause changes in the physical realm." (Bradshaw) It is this sharp conflict between the modern theistic worldview interwoven in the activities of the missionaries and the primal worldview held by Africans that justified the founding of Christian communities in mission centers.

Contextualization: The Church and Social Issues

The effects of independence were vividly seen perhaps more so in the church than outside it. The church was challenged more than before by the state and the people it educated. It was challenged to abandon the rescue mission model and adopt a contextualized model of mission. As the late Tanzanian president Julius Nyerere put it, "The church cannot uplift man, it can only help to provide the conditions and the opportunity for him to cooperate with his fellows to uplift himself." In other words one could say that Nyerere was challenging the church to contextualize its mission in society.

In the process of contextualization, the spirit of appreciating African culture emerged in the church. The church discovered some fine elements in traditional African culture, including "strong family ties, generosity, and strong community spirit." (Kinoti) Sadly these fine elements came under strong attack by the social forces of modernization, poverty, ignorance, diseases, and fatalism.

The notion that Tanzania needed to be modernized had already taken root at the time of independence in 1961. Modernization means the adoption of "attitudes and pattern of social behavior which were like those of the peoples of the North." (Howard) It requires a significant change in social norms, including changes in many of the traditional patterns of kingship support which is assumed to nurture an individualistic "free" enterprising spirit. Western education together with the introduction of cash crops provided a base for the spread of modernization in Tanzania. The adopted education prolonged the marriageable age resulting in increased pregnancies among unwed women. The search for wealth forced married people to stay away from their families, which increased divorce and promiscuity. This and other factors led to problems such as single parenthood, baby-dumping, runaway children commonly known as street children, and prostitution. The response of the church to these problems proved to be very inadequate and until the early 1990s, many

churches did not have programs that would meet needs of people experiencing separation, divorce, and pregnancy before marriage.

Poverty is related to modernization. While poverty is sometimes considered as simply constituting a lack of income, a deeper understanding of poverty requires us to look keenly at how poverty manifests itself in the lives of people created in the image of God. The church faces the challenge of demonstrating how it can meet the needs of hurting people "according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Phil 4:19). What are these riches? Are these riches intended to meet the spiritual or the social needs? Can these riches meet human need in wholeness? Should people in their poverty relax and wait for God to provide for their need?

For Africans with their primal worldview, God's power is not an abstract thing, but a concrete reality experienced in various ways. This belief taken to its extreme leads to fatalism. It creates robot-like behavior among the people holding a primal worldview. Everything that happens is "either the will of God, the work of evil spirits or the curse of departed elders." (Kinoti) This creates tolerance of all types of evils, natural and human-made. It is the context of this attitude that Nyerere challenged saying that, "unless we participate actively in the rebellion against those social structures and economic organizations which condemn men to poverty, humiliation and degradation, then the church will become irrelevant." (Nyerere)

Where are We Now? A Glimpse of What Could Be

Where are we now? The Tanzanian people are in their third year of governance by a multi-party system. This is a learning process on the form that power sharing takes. It is evident to the church that the major cause of social ills such as poverty, ignorance and disease is bad governance of our churches, schools, hospitals, business, and our government. The church has its own contribution toward helping or hindering the good governance of our society. Its contribution to governance is carried out through modeling, direct action, and inaction, conscious transmission of Christian values by word and deed to the government and society as a whole. This cannot happen by chance but by planning.

Many church leaders in Tanzania and some other countries spend their time reacting to crises of various sorts rather than doing planned work. The church is entrusted with the greatest business on earth. It is commissioned to preach the gospel to "the whole creation" (Mk 16:15). This requires careful planning. The plans of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT) for 1999 to 2001 are a reflection of its conception of mission, how it will be realized and with whom the church intends to enter into partnership. These plans are an attempt to predict its future and to carry out its activities in accordance

with its plans and not by chance. It is understood that it is practically impossible to predict the future because of the many factors which are likely to interfere with these plans. Nonetheless, it is an acknowledged fact that, without planning the church puts herself in a reactive rather than a responsive position when meeting human need.

The Responsibility of the Church¹

The bishops should remind the believers and the whole church leadership that, because the church is part of the society, it has to be directly involved in education for democracy from parish to national level.

However, direct involvement alone is not enough. The church has to be vocal, condemn the evil, and rebuke the society so that it does not plunge into destruction brought about by fracas, theft, robbery, murder, drunkenness, etc.

Further, we recommend that, apart from praying and reconciling our society, the church should be involved in conscientization, directing and advising society, the government, political parties and individuals on the execution and implementation of human rights.

In view of the fact that we heads of the church lead Christians from various political parties, our ordained leadership – bishops, pastors and their spouses should not seek membership to any political party.

The lay (church) leadership namely the national executive secretary, diocesan executive secretaries, heads of department at national and diocesan levels, should not be members of any political party. We also emphasize that lay Christians with higher positions in political parties should not be employed at the higher level of the church leadership without relinquishing their political party membership.

Therefore, in order to help our country, the whole church should conscientize the people to know their rights of voting and to usher them into the culture of democratic participation and not guided democracy. People should be educated on how to identify the right candidate regardless of the political party, color, tribe, ideology or religious faith.

In order to accomplish this, the church should use various means of media such as radio, newspapers/magazines and TV in order to educate and rebuke immoral methods used by various political parties.

Further, we the consultation participants recommend to the church that the Human Rights Desk due to be established should link its activities with those of the Christian Council of Tanzania and other churches to pool strength together.

However, in order to ensure that the church is clean, we the Bishops state that, all the ELCT leaders should be conversant with the constitutions of all political parties, and also, the church should know through person-to-person

¹ Excerpt from *The Bagamoyo Statement*, the Bishops' Summit on Economic and Political Democracy, Bagamoyo, March 1994, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania.

all Christian government leaders who are members of our churches in order to counsel them not be party to corruption in the government.

Moreover, we have seen the need for the church to find ways of discouraging businesses that destroy the ethics of society, such as video shows and bad films, the use of condoms and dresses not accepted by our society. By doing that we shall have proclaimed the mission of the church.

We the bishops are aware of the importance of education in the development of humans. The church should therefore develop new and effective strategies of teaching Christian education in schools. The church should also educate society about the environment.

Implications of Communion

Eric M. Allison

The Lutheran Church in Liberia (LCL) sees itself as a service-oriented Christian "fellowship" and "institution," called and established to participate in God's holistic mission to and among the peoples of Liberia and West Africa.

One can cite several distinctive characteristics of the LCL. First, having been established in 1860, it is one of the oldest churches on the African continent. Second, it was the first church to carry the gospel of God's love through Christ Jesus to the indigenous people in the interior of Liberia. Third, it was the first church to open a Christian health-workers training institute in Liberia, known today as the Phebe Hospital and School of Nursing. Today, the LCL, empowered by God's Spirit, has extended Christ's preaching, teaching, and healing ministries to 12 of the 13 political subdivisions or counties of Liberia.

Society views the LCL as a church predominantly composed of members from the two major ethnic groups: the Kpelle and Lorma. Society's perception of the Lutheran church is outdated. Although a recent statistical record has not yet been completed, the LCL has local congregations in 12 counties. These include members from the country's 16 different ethnic groups. One of the most challenging views is that held by members of the LCL about their own church. Lutherans see the church as a "parent" who nurtures its children in the things of God.

There are indeed some tensions between the LCL's official self-understanding and how it actually operates. The first tension lies in the reality that there are some differences in how the LCL conducts its life and how the early New Testament church carried out its life. We can admit that the boldness and charisma demonstrated by leaders and members of the early church are not adequately reflected in the lives of present leaders and members of the LCL. Another tension is how the Christian ministry should be carried out and who should carry it out. Thank God that the LCL is gradually moving from a "traditional style" of Christian ministry to a more "Holy Spirit-inspired style."

Since its foundation 138 years ago the idea of communion or sharing of common spiritual and economic gifts in our church's understanding and life has to a large extent been externally rather than internally oriented. God has been blessing us through our North American and European friends with spiritual, financial, material, technical, and even human gifts. Our weakness lies in our failure wisely to utilize these endowments and to develop our ministries, programs, ministers, and members for the sake of the Liberian society and the West African sub-region. So the concept of communion in our church's under-

standing and life has been important mainly to our North American and European Lutheran brothers and sisters, but not to us as members and leaders of the LCL.

The main social issues, conflicts, and dynamics in our Liberian context are many. They include the democratization of society; ethnic politics; industrialization; morality; secularization; science and technology; teenage pregnancy; detraumatization of a war-torn society; equitable management and distribution of abundant natural resources; sustainable development; and the eradication of illiteracy, disease, and poverty. The LCL is dealing with and responding to them in several ways.

In the first place, our church acknowledges and confesses Jesus Christ as its Savior, Lord, Head, and God. Christ has called us to serve as his agents in our context. Under divine guidance, direction, and inspiration our church has been organized and structured to carry out Christ's mission to and among the people of Liberia and West Africa.

For example, our church is currently helping with the detraumatization of our war-ravaged peoples on all levels. This is being done in collaboration with the Lutheran World Federation and its Department for World Service/Liberia Program. Our church is also working hand-in-hand and side-by-side with this partner on programs for enhancing food production, income-generation, and capacity building at the grassroots level of the church, community, and society. The strengths are theological and psychological in nature, while the weaknesses are sociological. There is a need for the church to develop a holistic or integrated approach by placing human development at the center of all its ministries, programs, and projects. By "human development" we mean improving the total person "and," not just "in," his or her environment.

When we recognize Christ in each other, and we together see our common spiritual needs, then together we will be willing to meet the varied economic needs each one of us has. These are some of the implications of communion. May God help us to cultivate a deeper appreciation of these implications so that they will challenge and inspire new ways of working together. One way in which churches in this communion can hold one another accountable for their decisions and actions is when Christ becomes our standard for evaluating one another.

The Engagement of the Church in Namibia

A. Hasheela

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN) is the product of the work of missionaries from a northern European country, Finland. It serves the whole person, which means caring for both the spiritual and physical needs of the people of God. This approach was inherited from those same missionaries. They started preaching the Good News to the people, promising salvation through believing in God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Besides preaching they taught reading and writing and healed the sick, building schools and hospitals.

Therefore, the church today continues to understand itself to be responsible for all aspects of human needs such as spiritual care, health care, education, diaconal, social and development work. On this basis, the church is currently running two high schools in the region, Oshigambo High School and Nkurenkuru High School. Not long ago the church handed over nine hospitals to the government. Now it runs two hospitals, Onandjokwe Hospital and Nkurenkuru Hospital, with their adjacent satellite clinics.

Appreciated by Society

The members of our church and society at large appreciate very much what the church is doing. There is considerable confidence in the church's institutions, such as hospitals and schools. The church is also regarded as a voice for the oppressed, the poor, and the marginalized, and as a shield for those who are threatened by any kind of social threat haunting the community.

The church operates not without tensions. For instance, some church structures are outdated; some guidelines date back to the missionary era and are more than a hundred years old; the constitution and the regulations need to be updated to match the challenges of today. The Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Church are the next largest denominations in Namibia followed by several other groups such as the Dutch Reformed Church, Methodist Church, Baptist Church, and others.

The idea of communion is new to many Namibians. But one can assume it will be appreciated, because through it believers will be able to understand the interdependency of all Christians.

Currently, the church is busy with the amendment of its constitution and bylaws. The church puts strong emphasis on missionary work, stewardship, and unity efforts between the three Lutheran churches in Namibia.

Fortunately the church is free to do its work without any restriction from the government. In some cases, the government is even ready to assist and takes over certain responsibilities. The Council of Churches in Namibia (CCN) provides a platform for the churches to work together. Unfortunately the church is very weak financially, and does not have enough qualified workers in its institutions. The process towards unity between the three Lutheran churches is a very slow one. Two other Lutheran churches exist besides the ELCIN: The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (GELC) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia (ELCRN). The ELCIN is convinced that joining international church organizations will challenge and inspire churches to work together and deepen their understanding of being in communion with one another.

Addressing Social Issues

The ELCIN tries to combat social problems in various ways.

AIDS: In 1991 the church made public a statement on HIV/AIDS through the media. The church has tried to draw society's attention to the presence of this killer disease and its dangers to the community, how it is spread, and how people can protect themselves. The emphasis has been put on people's ethical behavior.

AIDS is affecting more and more Namibians. From 1986 to the end of 1997, of the more than 40,000 Namibians who have been reported infected by HIV/AIDS, over 3,000 have already died. Therefore, the church has eagerly considered the need for spiritual counseling among those infected and their families. It constitutes an enormous challenge to the church as an institution and to the individual Christian. To show God's love in practice and to help people understand the gospel of eternal life in Jesus Christ. To give hope for the future, whether in this life or the life to come.

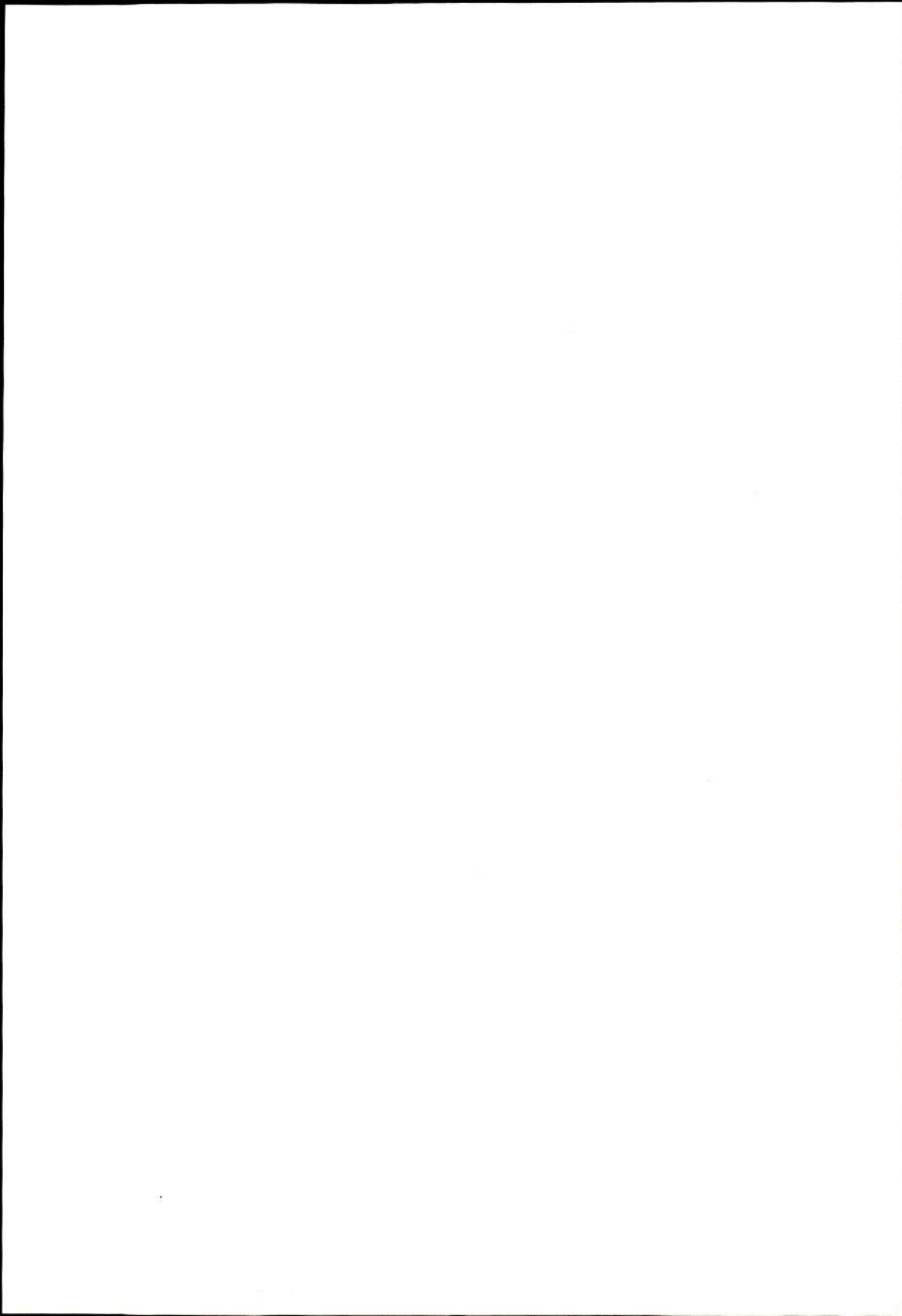
Responding to this need the ELCIN started an AIDS project in 1991 which has been mainly taken care of by the church's private hospital, the Onandjokwe Lutheran Hospital. Four nurses are working full-time on the project and the whole group of HIV/AIDS counselors is called *katonyala*, which means "the one who never gives up" or, "the courageous one." The church cooperates with the government through the Ministry of Health and Social Services in this regard. In fact, an agreement of cooperation was signed in July 1998 between the government and the church. The government of Namibia has even promised to give financial support to the church's program on AIDS.

Alcohol: The church also is running a program on temperance. Alcohol abuse poses a considerable threat to our society. There are a lot of liquor shops all over the country, especially along the main roads. One ELCIN pastor has been entrusted by the church with the responsibility of establishing an awareness campaign and counseling the community.

Marriage: A special office of the ELCIN deals with marriage counseling. Many people with either broken or troubled marriages make use of this service offered by a specialist in this field, who has received special training through the church. Courses are also being offered to many other pastors and lay people in the church in order to equip them with the skills necessary for marriage counseling. A major cause of marriage breakdowns and divorce is alcohol abuse.

Abortion: The ELCIN has taken a clear stance against the government's attempt to legalize abortion. Different churches in the country have different attitudes to this issue. There was no consensus in the CCN to take a joint stand on the question of whether or not to legalize abortion.

Bereavement: The church plays a vital role in counseling bereaved families and individuals. It was found to be a very fruitful moment for the church to bring the good news of the gospel to the people when they mourn and are sorrowful. They listen attentively to the Word of God, which is comforting and empowering.



The Lutheran Churches in Africa: Realities, Tensions, Strengths, and Deficits

Monica J. Melanchthon

Introduction

For the church to define itself intellectually, religiously, socially, and politically as “church” is not an easy task. It is an unsettled and unsettling identity (as identities generally are) and one that often feels compelled to give an account of itself. There is nothing inherently wrong with the church giving an account of itself. Its specific location as speaker and thinker; the complex experiences and perceptions and sense of life that fuels its concerns; the reasons, feelings, and anxieties that texture its position on any given issue; the values that inform its considered judgment of things are all part and parcel of who it is. These need to be constantly and consciously reviewed and accounted for.

Giving such an account of itself is a good exercise enabling the church to see, with humility, gratitude, and pain, how much it has been shaped by its contexts; to sense both the extent and the boundaries of its vision; to see how circumstances can circumscribe as well as inspire; and to become aware of its perspective on things. What is important, I believe, for the churches or the Christian community, is the sense that such an account is called for, even demanded, by our faith. In addition, it is called for by the sense others have that we occupy a suspect location (particularly in so-called third world, pluralistic countries), and that our perspectives and involvement are suspiciously tainted and problematic products of our colonization and Westernization.

There is always tension between what the church claims to be and what it actually is. Because of this tension, statements about the church are always controversial. My task in this brief essay is to attempt to build a bridge between what I heard at the African regional consultation to be the self-understanding of the Lutheran churches in Africa and the reality of what it actually is. This is not an easy task because my reading of the African situation is implicitly colored by my own cultural values and perspective. At the very outset it needs to be mentioned that this essays reflects what was heard at the consultation, a meeting that was dominated by a male, ordained majority representing the church hierarchy.

The Context of Africa

Africa is not a cultural unit. To talk about African society as a whole would result in the oversimplification of cultural differences, the number of tribal groups, the historical legacies of the many countries that compose Africa, the political realities and tensions, the different levels of development, and so on.

Despite the diversity of African societies, however, it is possible to say that Africa is a traditional society and to elicit some value features that might be said to be universal among Africans as a whole. These features arise out of its communitarian culture where the family is the basic social organization, its dependence on subsistence agriculture, and its holistic approach to life.

Some common features shared by African peoples are these:

- The idea of the existence of One Great God as an integral member of society;
- the belief in the perpetual existence of life, in which there is a cycle of pregnancy, life, death, and a period of waiting in a universal pool of spiritual existence with a subsequent reincarnation, by which it is possible to change one's lot for better or for worse;
- the belief in the sanctity of the human being;
- the idea that humanity is born free from sin;
- the idea of beauty of thought, speech, action, and appearance as a prerequisite for appointment to the high office of state;
- the importance of marriage as a criterion of social status;
- the idea that producing a child is necessary for the continuance of marriage;
- the principle of age as a vital criterion of wisdom;
- the tendency to stress, in all forms of art, the quality of significance as a criterion of beauty and virtue;
- spontaneity of self-expression;
- the peculiar conception that it is improper and obscene to thank someone soon after one has been offered food by a neighbor;¹
- the stress or importance that is attached to group life;
- the importance of kinship as represented in the institutional form of the extended family system irrespective of differences of descent systems;
- chiefship and its symbolic significance;
- the pervasiveness and stress on ceremony and ritual in many aspects of social life.²

¹ Cf. Kofi Antubam, *Ghana's Heritage of Culture* (Leipzig: Koehler and Amalang, 1963), as cited by J. Max Assimeng, "Historical Legacy, Political Realities and Tensions in Africa," in *Encounter of Religions in African Cultures* (Geneva: LWF, 1991).

² E. H. Mends, "Some Basic Elements in the Culture of Ghana," *Universitas* (Legon), vol. 7, no. 1 (1978), pp. 38-49, as cited by J. Max Assimeng in *ibid.*

It is essential that we bear these in mind as we attempt to understand the churches and the manner in which they see themselves and function. Against the backdrop of these traditional features, modern Africa is characterized by the following realities.

The Colonial Experience

The socio-economic and political history of the peoples of Africa is blemished by centuries of colonial experience and the debilitating structures of domination. Apart from creating psychological dependence and affecting the attitudes, mindsets, and life-styles, the colonial past has also left behind a network of structures – economic, educational and social – that still dominate. These structures both external and internal are maintained by neo-colonial economic relationships with the first world economic communities and constrict the process of socio-economic revolution in Africa.

Northern countries control scientific and technological know-how and instrumentation. Thus the related economic structures of Africa are still dependent on these Northern countries. International bodies, namely, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank (WB), further strengthen such economic dependencies. Capitalist world powers impose a pattern of development that leads to further problems. For reasons of profit and cheap labor, local and traditional industries are exploited and made redundant. Out of this matrix arise various forms of debilitating consumerism. National priorities are skewed. Promotion of exports is dictated by the priorities of national economic concerns.

Many independent African nations have within them a westernized elite with economic interests integrated into the interests of the outgoing colonial powers. These groups not only benefit at the expense of the masses, but also continue to serve as effective instruments in the transfer of profit to the Northern countries and restrict the possibility of self-reliance, thereby keeping millions at the lowest level of subsistence.

Poverty

African countries are characterized by widespread poverty. Acute poverty exists alongside segregated affluence. The few who control political power are those who control and own the means of production. The majority, lives in want of food, water, shelter, clothing, and security. Because Africa is caught up in a cycle of poverty that features low productivity, low income, low savings, and therefore low investment, it has little money to meet the basic needs of its people. This is compounded by the lack of peace, quality of life, conve-

nient means of transport and communication, and a rapid growth in population which outstrips the continent's capacity.

Ethnocentrism

Ethnocentrism plays a major and significant role in present day African politics. While the plurality of African society—its culture, language, and religion—is certainly its most characteristic feature, it is precisely from this wonderful quality that the problem of ethnocentrism has been derived. There are many vices: social injustice, economic exploitation, political ambition, military force, insensitivity to human dignity, religion, and racial discrimination. Such problems are to a large extent caused by ethnocentrism. Despite sporadic efforts on the part of some countries to integrate all groups into a single people and to provide a sense of identity, minority groupings have often been marginalized for various reasons. Thus the concept of "nation" remains open to criticism and redefinition.

Inferior Status of Women

As African societies are male-dominated, there still exist role expectations, customs, and practices stemming from traditional systems and cultures that are oppressive to women. African women are accorded an inferior status both in church and society, denied equal participation in public roles, and confined to traditional roles. Women's contributions to the nation are underplayed. In situations of conflict and war, women become targets of violence, rape and harassment.

Militarism and Repressive Regimes

Several African countries are governed by military and repressive regimes which have suppressed the freedom of the people and have given a disastrously low priority to social and economic planning.

Religious Context

In the African context one finds a world of religions and plurality of world views. Besides Traditional African Religion with many liberating elements such as the emphasis on community with the cosmos, Africa has over the last century seen the most massive and variegated response to the Christian faith in the history of Christian missions.

The present-day churches of Africa have their source in the missionary zeal of the European and North American churches. The christianization of Africa by the missionaries from these two continents went hand in hand with the colonizers, traders, and soldiers. They were zealous for souls but tended to think that the commercial and military expansion was a providential opportunity for the salvation of souls and the spread of the gospel. Thus, missionaries collaborated in the colonial expansion and enterprise. Besides a rapid growth in the Christian population, is the accompanying mushrooming of African indigenous churches most of which are break-away groups from the established missionary churches founded by African converts.

In its nascent form, African ecclesiology focused on the relation between the church and the world. A common element in several statements on the African church is the attempt to identify modalities that would clarify that relationship.

Although the expressive traditions of African Traditional Religion have numerous ways of speaking of the church, there appear to be four primary modalities around which most of the ecclesiological discourse centered. These are:

- The community of believers and saints: in its life and witness, the church is seen as a community of people called out of the world, sin, and death to serve the Lord Jesus Christ without fear, in holiness and righteousness;
- the family or household (*oikos*) of God;
- the people of God;
- the church as a social and economic institution and mother and father; a model of democracy; fellowship, an institution called to participate in God's holistic mission; prophets and advocates of injustice; servants to practice charity; stewards; new humanity; one body.

Triumphalism, Poverty, and the Lack of Social Critique

In spite of the loss of morale, of a sense of being alien, and of confusion and underlying fear in the face of the political, cultural, and socio-economic revolution in Africa, the triumphalism of the church remains. Money is still available from the funding agencies in the West for the established churches, religious orders, development project holders, and also social activists. And money is a dominant source of power in a society where the majority of the people are poor. The established church is rich and triumphalistic.

The church is poor. This does not mean that the institutions and sectors of the clergy and religious congregations are not rich. The African churches are in the midst of growing individualism, enterprise, efficiency, profit, competition, self-interest, domination, power, consumerism. The church will admit

that it has not remained unaffected by this culture and that it has even cooperated in the birth and nurture of such a culture.

High among the causes must be placed the theology that is imported from the West: individualistic in morality, socially uncritical, and heavily weighted on the side of the preservation of the *status quo*. It is a theology of a certain immobility in which the highest value has been the building and preservation of the church itself.

The church's preoccupation with its social service institutions and diaconal ministries and its mere involvement in social service only strengthens the prevalent social system but does not help to change it.

Its Relation to Diverse Faiths, Particularly Islam

Even to a detached observer it is obvious that the encounter between Africa's different religions—African Traditional Religion, Christianity, Islam, and other ideologies—is a major factor in the ferment at work in the society of Africa, a continent struggling to come to terms with modernity.

Christians need to collaborate with people of other faiths in Africa, where ancient traditional religions have come to be very real forces in shaping the thinking and living of society. This calls for a measure of identification with those who do not agree, in fact, repudiate the fundamental presuppositions and ultimate objectives of Christian faith.

For many reasons, Christianity and Islam in Africa have encountered each other as rivals, if not enemies. The difference between Christians and Muslims is related to two matters. The first one involves the monotheistic claims of both religions—because of mainline Christianity's avowals of a trinitarian theology, Christians have been perceived differently. However much the church may deny being guilty of polytheism, the problem is one of perception or misconception. Second, not enough attention has been paid to the issues of religious pluralism and secular ideologies and the need for dialogue.

Strength

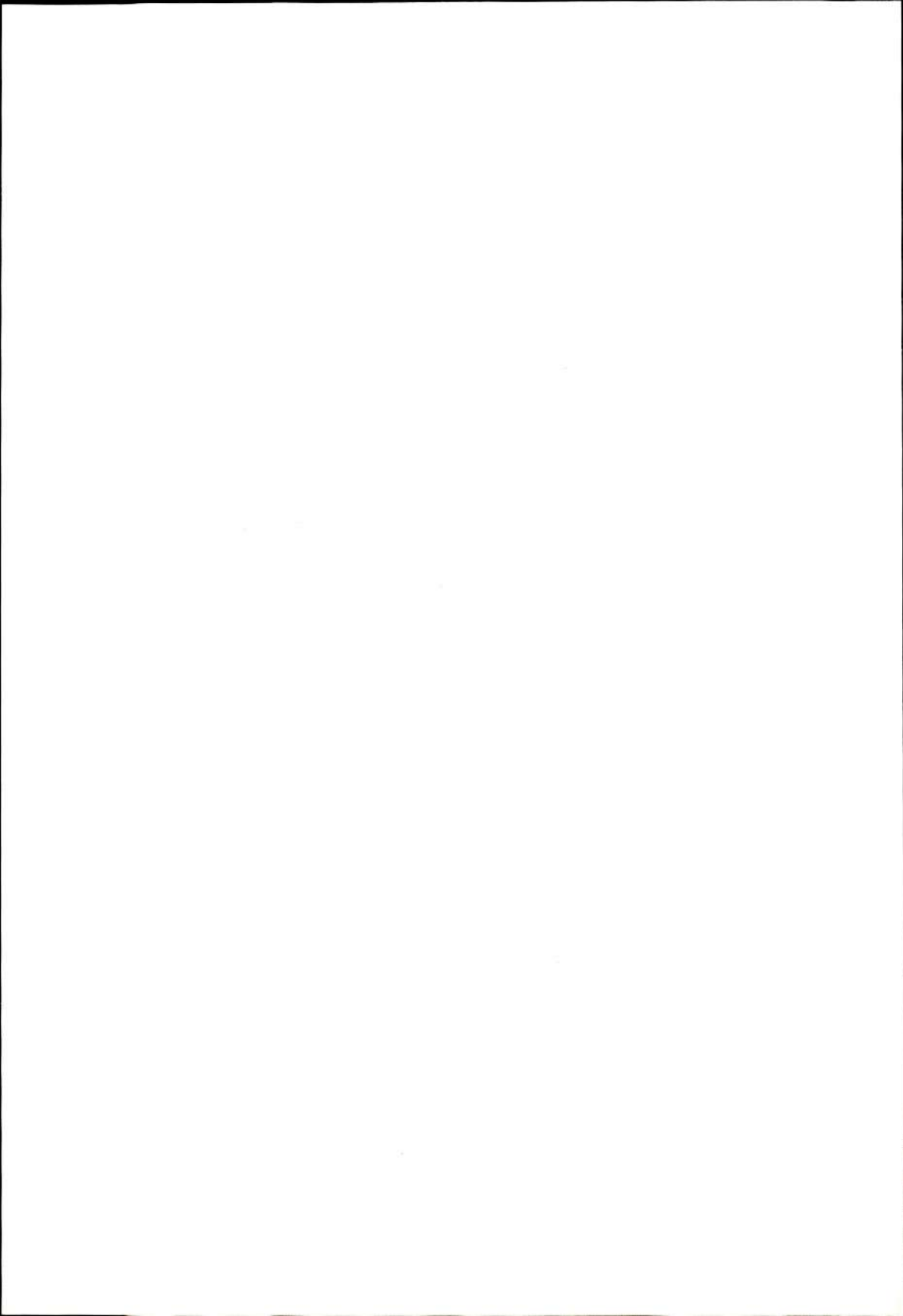
It must be remarked that despite the turbulence which African societies have been going through, the continent's population remains essentially religious. The majority religious community (at least close to half) in almost all the countries represented at the meeting, is Christian. While this may not mean much, there is strength in numbers. Considering the high involvement of Christian members in politics, it gives them the opportunity to influence the social, economic, and developmental policies of the government with values and ethics derived from the Christian faith.

The religious sphere of life had everything to do with the ordering of the social and economic spheres of life. Religion therefore functions as the sacred canopy, overarching all the affairs of human life. Religion functioned in its cosmological way, creating "cosmos."

There was little or no institutional differentiation. The familial, political, educational/economic and religious spheres of life were part and parcel of the whole social fabric. Religion permeated everything: when one was born into a social group he was also born into a religion.³

African churches should not lose touch with this cosmological framework and the holistic approach to life.

³ H. M. Hodges, *Conflict and Consensus: An Introduction to Sociology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), pp. 373-74, as cited by J. Max Assimeng in *ibid.*



Who's "In" and Who's "Out"?

Karen L. Bloomquist

In much of Africa, churches were "planted" largely along tribal lines. To be a certain tribe is to be culturally Lutheran. Those tribal groups who converted tended to be viewed positively, and those who did not were considered "primitive." Thus Christian missions tended to inject new relationships of superiority versus inferiority in African societies. Establishing schools became a dominant evangelizing and civilizing strategy, along with health care and other social services. Even today, tribal identities tend to have a stronger influence over people than does their religious identity, and deeply affect how churches are organized. Family, tribe and community tend to operate as unquestioned lines of demarcation.

The church testifies to God's reconciliation through Jesus Christ that crosses, challenges, and transforms tribal boundaries of who's "in" and who's "out." What's in the interest of a household, tribe, or community, and practices and customs in service of such, are set in the context of and critiqued by the gospel that tenaciously cuts across all human-created boundaries and forms "a new people." As crucial as contextualization of the church in Africa has been and continues to be, this cannot be at the sacrifice of the gospel's critical dynamic that challenges tendencies to legitimate or confirm traditional assumptions and practices if they were the Christian absolutes. God works through the Spirit to build community that goes beyond tribal and all other divisions in society.

Prevalent also is a moralizing tendency for determining who is "in" and who is "outside" the church. There seems to be a third article focus on sanctification, in ways that may overshadow the second article implications of how God's gracious activity in Jesus Christ transforms these distinctions, and provides a new basis for the moral life and our communion with one another. Moral practices, particularly those related to sexuality, become central lines of demarcation, and in many cases, excommunication. In some cases, these exclusions may be based more on traditional cultural taboos than on explicitly theological grounds, even though the Bible is often used to "prove" or justify the rightness of certain exclusions.

African churches face dilemmas similar to the New Testament church. In his epistles, St. Paul drew upon classical vice lists to indicate practices that Christian converts should turn away from. African churches today rely on traditional tribally-based taboos and practices for what it means to be moral. In some cases, this seems right and fitting, but some such practices or prohi-

bitions may actually convey confusing messages about what it means to be "Christian." Theologically we might ask, why give unquestioned moral priority to traditional vice lists or certain taboos that may at times impede the realization of the gospel's transformative grace?

At the same time, how some African churches have dealt with the pivotal issue of polygamy may be a hopeful model for how the church can deal with difficult ethical issues. Rather than strictly requiring polygamous men who become Christians to "discard" their wives—which could lead to further injustices—patterns of accommodation to this practice have emerged, and (in the case of Tanzania) left to each diocese to decide. In this sense, the African church might begin modeling the kind of community of moral deliberation that Paul saw exemplified in the early church. Rather than being recipients of already worked out answers as to what is right or wrong, in this case, according to externally imposed cultural standards, the church as the people gathered and empowered by the Holy Spirit, were able to deliberate together in free and open speech, what is faithful in a given context and what are the consequences of decisions and structures.

This way of being church, rather than relying on hierarchically-imposed mandates of "the right way" to be the church or to live the Christian life, could open up important discussions of power, how it operates, and theologically understood, how it should operate in the church as *communio*.

Church as Community – Church as Society

Dietz Lange

Church-as-community is often identified with church-as-society (or institutional organization). This abstract formulation is just a shorthand expression for one of the biggest problems in many African churches, as they were presented to us at the African regional consultation.

Dioceses, as organizational units or societal organizations, are often established along tribal or community lines. As a European, I am reminded by this of similar conceptions in Europe where national allegiance was compounded with church allegiance. For instance, being German ranked before being Christian. Tribal allegiance as an expression of community spirit is certainly one of the great strengths of African culture. It becomes a problem, however, as soon as one tribal allegiance is set against another, or when the tribe becomes a measure of church polity. The latter then is in danger of becoming a tool of nepotism and power politics. In this case, the church tends to work from top to bottom, instead of the other way around. Let me add parenthetically that the temptation to conceive of the church as an hierarchy is by no means a specifically African one. We encounter it all over the world, in churches of every confessional outlook. Nonetheless it is a serious problem. To be sure, power is indispensable in practical social life. But exerting it jeopardizes all too easily the equality of all human beings before Christ (Gal 3:28). It can make a shambles of the priesthood of all believers (1 Pet 2:9) which Martin Luther constantly stressed in his teachings on the church. As can be seen from the essays in this volume the African churches are well aware of this danger and take it quite seriously. Where this is done, the church does not intend to dominate but to witness and to serve. And it creates more democratic structures, allows women equal rights with men as regards to leadership positions. Obviously, much progress has been made in this field.

As for the tribalist conception of many dioceses, larger organizational structures (church-as-society) could be of considerable help in changing things. For example, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT) has been established to create a bond between the various dioceses and to bridge the gap between tribal structures. There are certainly ways to translate this from the organizational (societal) level to the level of community so that people from different tribal backgrounds learn to understand each other better. It is my impression that African churches on the whole are quite aware of the need to have both community and society within themselves. Community (family, the village, the neighborhood, the local congregation) is always primary—the sense

of belonging, mutual trust and mutual help being the basic ingredients of all social life. But society, larger organizational structures, can serve as a remedy for the community's deterioration into a collective egoism.

The point that is left is the church's relation to society at large. Here it is obvious from the rapid growth of African churches that they are not complacent and self-contained but feel responsible for proclaiming the gospel to anyone they can reach. The position of an evangelist in each congregation is further evidence of this. Thereby, the universality of Christ's commandment is borne out, "Go forth and make all nations my disciples" (Mt 28:19). On this score, there is definitely great need for improvement in many European churches.

As far as social commitment to society at large is concerned, it has been pointed out repeatedly that it must go beyond pure charity and include political activities. This is true for both the North Atlantic and the African contexts. There are people who argue against this proposition, that Jesus was no politician and that therefore, his followers should also abstain from mingling in politics. But this is only a half-truth. We ought only to remember what Jesus said on the question of taxes to be paid to the Roman emperor in Matthew 22:21, "Pay Caesar what is due to Caesar, and pay God what is due to God." This means by implication: If Caesar claims divine adoration, if he asks things contrary to God's commandments, don't obey him! And that is very clearly a political utterance. To put it into the context of our conference: This is the kind of "neutrality" the Ethiopian church observed when it resisted certain objectionable claims from the political institutions. This kind of political activity often entails suffering. Even if that is not always as dramatic as in the Ethiopian case: simply not being able to achieve anything against a corrupt government's shenanigans, in spite of all one's efforts, is a kind of suffering too.

Latin America

A Brazilian Experience: A Strange Familiarity

Dietz Lange

Before coming to Brazil, I had learned that the province of Rio Grande do Sul is one of Brazil's most densely populated areas. On the short ride from Porto Alegre to São Leopoldo I was struck by the wide open spaces which reminded me of parts of the North American Midwest. If this is called densely populated, what would the more sparsely inhabited northern Brazil look like? This was the first hint of the vastness of the country we had come to visit. We saw some more of it on a car ride into the wooded hills near Novo Hamburgo, and came to appreciate the beauty of the landscape in this area.

At the hostel, we were given a very friendly welcome, as we had in India and in Tanzania, but, again in a very different setting. The first thing to surprise me was that almost everyone spoke German. And a very charming kind of German at that, interspersed with adapted Portuguese words, such as *Die Gewalt kommt immer näher* ("Violence is getting closer all the time"). The way we were received reminded me vaguely of my own country, Germany, but it had a generosity to it not often encountered back home. This huge country somehow must have opened up the people that live here. We experienced the same generosity at a birthday party to which we had been spontaneously invited.

Die Gewalt kommt immer näher. It is probably not by accident that it is this short sentence that has stuck in my mind. We were certainly put up in a very safe place, no doubt about that. But this safety had to be guaranteed by elaborate security measures. A gate at the entrance to the compound, opened only by a guard, was a matter of course. It went without saying, that the guard was armed. There were tales of the occasional mugging on the premises in spite of all these measures. The downtown "mall" of São Leopoldo was heavily policed, even though this city is by no means considered to be a center of crime. I took it as a sure sign of the enormous gap between the rich and the poor in this country. However, we did not have a constant feeling of being haunted. For instance, we felt quite safe one evening when we went to a bar in Porto Alegre to hear a famous local band, which all of us greatly enjoyed.

At the Latin American regional meeting itself, several things struck me immediately. One was that this Lutheran church in Brazil (as apparently is true in other Latin American churches) does not cultivate hierarchy. Its president

wears as casual an attire as everybody else, not claiming—or being granted—any kind of pontifical authority. I found this most refreshing. I think it might be a good idea to have some of Germany's bishops learn some Portuguese and then ship them to this country to serve for a couple of years (even though admittedly there has been some change in this respect in Germany in the course of the last few decades).

The lack of hierarchy certainly has to do with the way in which Lutheran churches in Latin America are being run. Their minority status in their respective societies is obvious even to the foreign observer. We learned that a large number of small congregations scattered across such a huge expanse of land simply cannot be governed in a rigidly centralized fashion. So, in Brazil at least, the church body had to split up into several largely independent synods. This kind of "federalism" was reflected in the character of the papers read at the conference. There was little in the way of a grand overview and instead many detailed descriptions of specific and distinctly different local situations.

The minority status of Lutherans here was, at least until quite recently, apparently tied up with the language issue. As I have already mentioned, I was quite surprised at how many people at the conference and in the congregation we visited could either speak or at least understand German. In many other ways too, the ties to "the old country" were quite palpable, even in financial terms, as far as new projects were concerned. The reverse side of this seems to be the persistence of a strong ethnic limitation of the Lutheran church in most Latin American countries, in spite of the fact that nowadays, everyone speaks Spanish or Portuguese, respectively.

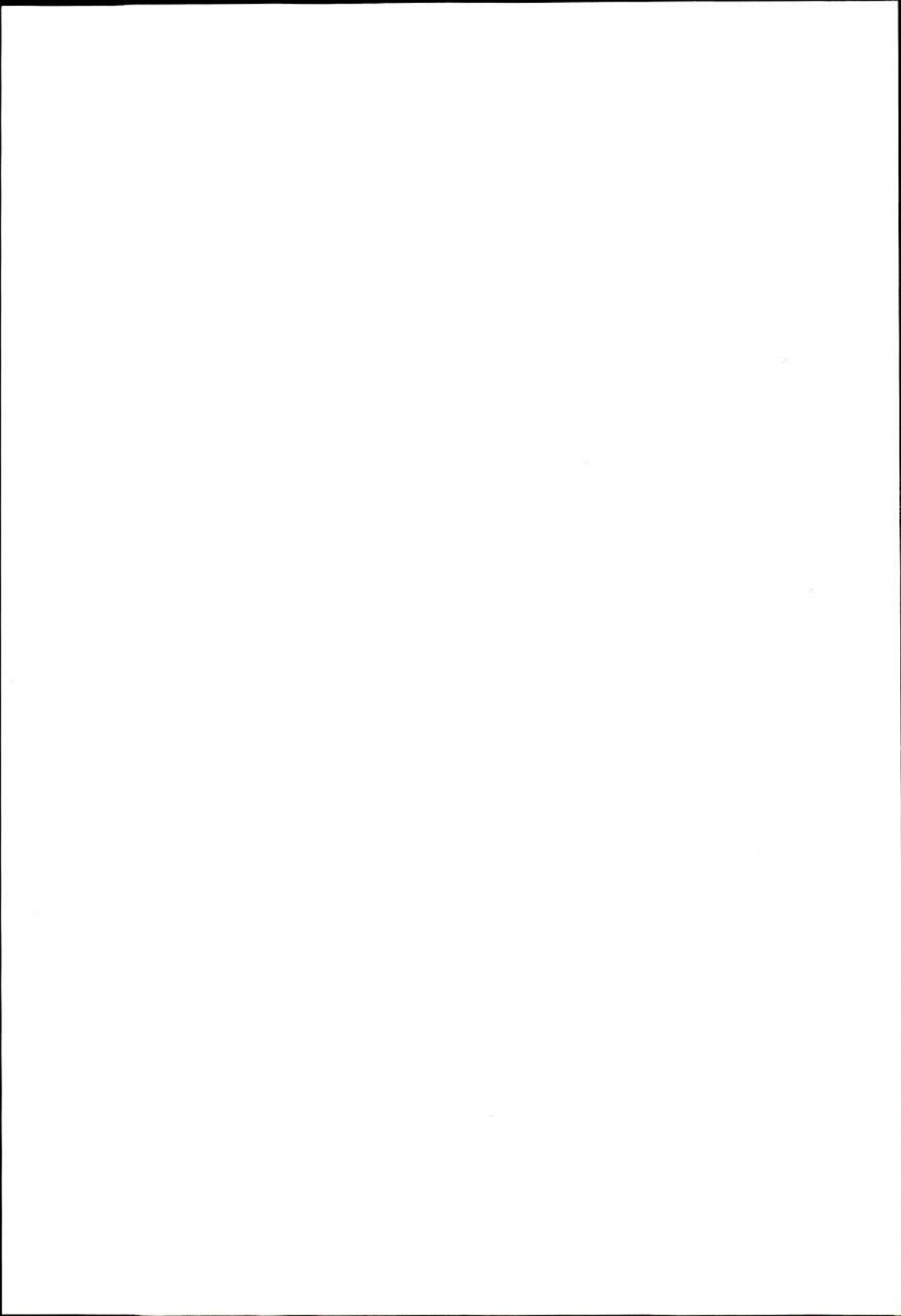
Lutherans have not had it much easier since those early days. There have been difficulties in defining their identity over against post-Vatican-II Roman Catholicism, a challenge only reinforced by recent ecumenical developments. In addition, Latin American Lutheran theology has been strongly influenced by Roman Catholic liberation theology. On the other hand, Lutherans, being a more traditional type of church, do not seem to have an easy time coping with the Pentecostalists' and other non-traditional Protestant groups' highly aggressive methods of evangelization. There were frequent complaints that the Lutheran church had been doing exemplary social work in some big city *favela* (slum), only to see the people it had been working with drift off to some charismatic or fundamentalist church for worship. Apparently, a simplistic and unequivocal message comes across much more easily in the turmoil of rapid urbanization, soaring unemployment and an atmosphere rife with crime and drugs than does the more dialectic approach of the historic churches. Lutherans seem to be resisting, nonetheless, the temptation of simplifying their theological basis in an opportunistic way. One indication of this is the serious theological work that was perceptible in the discussions throughout the conference.

The social work being done by the Lutheran churches greatly impressed me. We saw one outstanding example of it during a visit on Sunday to a congregation in a largely non-Lutheran environment. It seemed to be only the Lutherans who cared about the needs of their desperately poor neighborhood—running a large kindergarten, giving advice to the adults, carrying through an apparently very efficient work program with women in the adjacent slum, as well as frequently inviting people from that same area for meals in their church center. We learned of many more such setups in other parts of the country and indeed the continent, both in the papers read and in private conversations. Social work seems to be one of the great strengths of the Lutheran church in South America, even though there was a ubiquitous complaint of there not being enough of it because of middle-class complacency in many congregations. But then, the misery and squalor in the cities is obviously such that only major shifts in public policy could be expected to bring about any real change. It struck me all the more that for all its social engagement and its liberation theology fervor, there was an uncanny absence at the conference of any large-scale political analysis. That surely marked a change as compared to the heyday of liberation theology. (Mario J. Yutzis' paper that was received after the consultation seems to represent a fairly typical if one-sided point of view.)

Social work also appears to be one of the ways in which the church is trying to redefine its identity. The catchword used many times over was "inclusiveness." Working with the marginalized and destitute so that they may enjoy their legitimate human rights and dignity was seen as a consequence of justification by faith alone: acceptance by God without any merit on our part leads to receiving the poor and the outcast in the church without any precondition, including that of the "right" creed.

A final interesting aspect was the strong emphasis on liturgy, especially on the Lord's Supper. Very creative efforts are being made to free liturgy from traditionalist bonds and adapting it to the indigenous culture. We experienced some impressive examples of this at the conference. As a German, I was at times tempted to ask what was Lutheran in these liturgies, for all the admirable creativity and poignant social relevance that they conveyed. Nonetheless, my own church back in Germany could certainly learn from these efforts at relating the worship service to the situation of society, looking at the very traditional liturgy we have (even in its newly revised form).

In sum, it was another very instructive conference. Of course, one cannot catch more than a glimpse during a week, even with a local committee doing such an excellent job in organizing the meeting. One could not possibly make an event like this more informative in such a short time. The gracious hospitality we received at many levels made these days all the more memorable.



Taking Stock and Looking Into the Future

Mario J. Yutzis

Introduction

As was only to be expected, in Latin America like everywhere else, the dawning millennium has clearly shown that a quantum shift is taking place, bringing in a new world. Whether we like it or not, the Fordian, Keynesian, and National socio-economic system is becoming a thing of the past. It was Fordian because mass production went hand in hand with mass consumption. It was Keynesian because it was imbued with the idea that distribution creates demand for goods and services, and in turn, demand creates employment. It was National because it fell within a relatively closed economic horizon wherein the state had relatively strong regulatory powers. Of course, that was the welfare state.

It may be concluded that, within its limits, this threefold socio-economic model did to some extent match social aspirations with economic needs. The industrialization process—together with the expectation and possibility of meeting comfort-related material needs such as housing, cars, and household goods—channeled society's efforts into distribution, which meant that sectors that previously had had no access to consumerism acquired purchasing power. While there was the battering-ram effect of state participation on all fronts, the "social economic" was where the major gains were made. And, except for the blatantly alternative tendencies of the so-called Beat Generation of the 1950s, or later the precepts of May 1968, in the main (to our way of thinking) everyone else fell in line to support the project that promised better wages, better working conditions, joint management, better social benefits and so on.

The scenario has changed drastically. The world economic market now dances to a different tune. We're in a new phase of capitalist enterprise dubbed globalization. This sort of capitalist venture does not simply mean one bloc of states lording it over another. Nor does it mean merely the success of one economic system by comparison with its rivals. In practice, globalization means a huge shift in the balance of power between markets and states. It once again brings into question—in an entirely new framework—the source or effect of economic authority and its impact on society as a whole. Indeed, we are now not addressing a more or less domestic economic structure. We are undergoing the tremendous impact of a worldwide market economy, where the relatively peaceable confines of a closed-circuit cause-and-effect economic

set-up which promised supply that it would create demand and assured demand that it would create supply, today in no way has the same relevance.

The determinants of economic progress have shifted and the change is radical. Innumerable regulations and integrating mechanisms no longer work, or work against the grain. Those that date back to before the Cold War must be recast, just as once those that belonged to the post-war era had to be built. Together with the meaning of all this and the eventual outcome in the economic environment as such, the coordinates included in this world shift have fundamental social implications and amount to a considerable cultural change for each and every one of us.

Below is a concise overview of some of the main effects on Latin America as a result of the changes coming about in the world.

One Basic Feature: Economic Instability

First and as an immediate background to the new millennium, it must be said that the 1980s were a highly traumatic time for the region. The major recession that hit most Latin American countries as a result of the foreign debt crisis can in some ways be compared to the Great Depression of the 1930s in the United States. In order to overcome the crisis, the region adopted reforms as of 1980 that tended to follow a two-track approach of improving the market by freeing it up and at the same time improving the state by restricting it. Almost all the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, to a greater or lesser extent, introduced privatization, deregulation, liberalization of trade and finance—key issues in the Washington Agreement. Quite apart from governments, political forces, and many entrepreneurial sectors as well as public opinion, the region seemed to incline towards the market economy and privatization rather than state control.

What is striking is that these economic trends and the consequent measures introduced did not address criteria for maintaining social security. There is incontrovertible theoretical and practical evidence to show that many reforms geared to the market entail high, foreseeable social risks, particularly among the laboring sectors and the most vulnerable groups. What actually happens is that today as a result of technology, production can be achieved with a much smaller input of labor. One direct consequence is that a whole swathe of people who used to take part in forming the national product through the labor market, today are sitting on the sidelines. In recent decades, it was thought that this would affect only a small number so the problem was dismissed as being of no great importance. Now it is clear that there is a real danger of serious social consequence. As far as Latin America and the Caribbean is concerned, as in other regions, the following have been noted:

- The public sector has shrunk as privatized enterprises have been streamlined—which, at least in the short term, has drastically reduced jobs and sent unemployment soaring;
- financial liberalization has caused large-scale, very volatile, capital movements on the economic front;
- excessive movement of capital in turn changed the perception of a country's risk rating: instead of the volatile movement of funds what mattered was labor market standstill.

The impact of these variables in Latin America leads to one important conclusion: the market-liberalization reforms carried through by countries in the region have increased economic insecurity, which was earlier generated by the extended debt crisis. This largely came about because those reforms were carried out with almost no preventive programs, so hundreds of thousands of wage-earners fell out of the market with no welfare net to catch them.

The Crisis in Representation

In addition, and despite transitions to democracy, there has been a dire loss of public participation in the region, both institutional and individual. This weakening of the participatory process must be seen as one more factor exacerbating economic insecurity.

Take the trades unions, for example. As everybody knows, the unions are important not just because they act as a pressure group in the political sphere but also because their participation tends to help regulate the labor market. Unfortunately, barring a very few exceptions, at present the unions have lost both membership and credibility. This erosion of union participation derives in Latin America from a historically negative practice of lobbying to obtain labor protection and vague advantages, an approach which now is hardly appropriate in fiercely competitive markets. In this sense, we should explain that trade unions are also unable to formulate sufficiently clear political responses to the workers' needs.

Together with this loss of union representation, there is a clearly visible general emergency as regards political representation. There are several concomitant factors which have unleashed this crisis.

On the one hand, with the swing of the pendulum towards a free market, people's parties and so-called "cooperation agreements" were weakened just when public support was needed to guarantee stability for economic reforms and constitutional governments. Political parties are perceived as merely a clutch of factions, parliamentary structures as ineffectual and state officials as corrupt. As the French sociologist J. Baudrillard has said, today living representation does not exactly enjoy legitimacy. Legitimacy is up for grabs, in

advertising and speeches. In this regard, Latin America is also paying its dues to the post-modern culture in the sense that politics has become a media circus. Moreover, real political decision-making power has given way before globalization strategies. So, policy operations which used largely to be able to represent the will of the people today have lost independence and the ability to innovate.

A second conclusion can be drawn here: while the crisis of political representation is one variable in itself, particularly as regards participation and cultural level, it also has an adverse effect on economic affairs by increasing their instability.

Some of the Faces of Inequity

In the last 10 years, the 12 percent drop in *per capita* income reinforced by the concentration of income in fewer hands increased the population living in poverty from 34 to 40 percent. Although the problem is still more acute in rural areas, the deterioration appeared to be worse in urban areas. It has been estimated that 60 percent of the poor live in cities. The root causes of the problem lie in the urban labor market, which by inference must be related to the demands of globalization. The constant recession-triggering adjustments meant that the 2 percent annual job creation rate in the formal sector was insufficient to absorb the 3.9 percent growth in the urban Economically Active Population (EAP). As a result, both informal occupations and direct unemployment rose significantly at a rate of 6.8 percent to 8.1 percent respectively. Hence in the same period, the 8 percent reduction in the impact of formal employment on the urban labor force was offset by both an increase in the informal sector (3.8 percent) and the visible unemployment rate.

At present, these figures are again on the increase. Against this backdrop, sifting out the social groups which have suffered from the higher level of poverty, the biggest impact can be traced through the number of unemployed. In brief, workers have to absorb the higher cost of adjustments which shows up in higher unemployment figures, a loss of quality in employment and a drop in real earnings. As a result, there was a considerable increase in poverty, and that part of the population's purchasing power was curtailed more severely than that of the non-poor part of society. These middle-ranking sectors—in some ways the new poor—weigh heavily on direct unemployment and underemployment and their historic wage levels have plummeted.

The gradual increase in unemployment and poverty gives rise, not just in Latin America but around the world, to both an employment-purchasing power crisis, on top of a "social crisis." The two are connected. As the global market economy is extended and solidly woven into the social fabric, the influence is such that social relations increasingly mimic market mechanisms and become

more and more selective, exclusive, and competitive. It is easy to see how underemployment or unemployment in turn affect social affairs. This two-fold loss, and the resultant loss of the world of work, reduce the warp and woof of social relations and rather make the interpersonal network of relations more fragile, thereby reducing the possibilities of reentering employment. It seems platitudinous—particularly when comparing the situation with previous decades—to say that the circles of solidarity have gradually been undermined and those that remain are weakened.

Exclusion: A Symptom on the Increase

In this overview, there is one social and cultural problem that is increasingly raising alarm in Latin America as it advances with giant strides. Exclusion. This is a matter which, although it does not fall within a social category profile, nonetheless fairly clearly identifies people's remoteness, loss of direct involvement, and falling away from membership and participation in civic life. The challenge of exclusion calls for the introduction of subtle shades of distinction and fresh concepts.

Why do we need fresh concepts? Because exclusion seems to be to the post-industrial society what the labor issue was to industrial society. As this is a subject that goes beyond the scope of this essay, the discussion will be confined to how it relates to poverty, unemployment, and exploitation from a Latin American standpoint.

The rules of market forces have led to society's being run by third parties and at the same time have made for an increasingly selective system which demands greater occupational qualifications and higher relating skills. A structural employment crisis, therefore, has been created where exclusion emerges as the simultaneous loss of three things in social life:

- exclusion from work (mention has already been made of the increased rate of unemployment);
- social intercourse; and
- personal identity.

What is new is that this process is in no way similar to the long-familiar process of domination-exploitation. This is not to say that the contradiction has disappeared. The conflicting factors coexist, intermingle, and mutually reinforce each other. The indicators seem to show that exclusion in enterprises begins with the casual, less-skilled workers followed by the skilled workers who have reached a certain age-limit or wage ceiling. This is where the hard exclusion process begins outside the enterprise. The indicators also show that a pool or population of sidelined people present a great temptation to others to resort once more to exploitation, therefore there can be no simplis-

tic replacement of one paradigm by another. Nonetheless, the two paradigms are different.

Taking the comparison further, it can be added that in classic exploitation the unbalanced social relationship may have attendant balancing mechanisms. In classic economics, when a transaction fluctuated freely, supply was compatible with demand and vice versa. This is the implicit logic in a balance of power between those who have to supply and those who have to demand.

However, as was said in the introduction, as things now stand in the global market there is quite a different logic at work. Particularly in the matter of exclusion. In this area, the "included" or the mainstream population ask nothing of the "excluded" or marginalized—and the latter are starting to feel that they have nothing to offer. Here, the demand curve of the included and the supply curve of the excluded are apparently not meeting. From this standpoint, if unemployment is a conflict, exclusion is a divide. Exclusion is the mark of a lack of community feeling, of moral, cultural, and economic impoverishment. It is something that endangers the balance advocated by the French thinker Paul Ricoeur between care for oneself, interest for others, and just institutions.

Some Conclusions

After the crisis in what was dubbed the "lost decade" of the 1980s in Latin America and the Caribbean, the 1990s represented the full flush of the "Liberal Conservative Revolution." Hence, Latin America and the Caribbean joined the free market model and the global village more than in any other region and at any other time throughout its history.

The prevailing economic model, far from answering the exigencies and needs of vulnerable groups, has left them at the mercy of the market with no reinsurance. The tangible result is that this strategy has increased poverty levels and exacerbated social imbalance.

Without disregarding the complexity of the economics of today and the difficulties inherent in the new rules of the game at this stage of capitalism, it can be said that the market has not managed fully to reproduce the economic premises that guarantee a recurring value added on capital and an equitable distribution of goods. Therefore, it is essential to define an area in practice where the state will be obliged to reconsider its current position and to take a more active role in regulating the economy.

Here, it is appropriate to repeat and underscore what has already been said: it is up to the state to determine, promote, and give legitimacy to measures that would provide well-being such as growth, employment, monetary stability, stimulation of demand, and equal opportunity with no exclusion or discrimination of any kind. Carrying out these measures is decisive for promot-

ing human rights in general and for protecting the most vulnerable among us in particular.

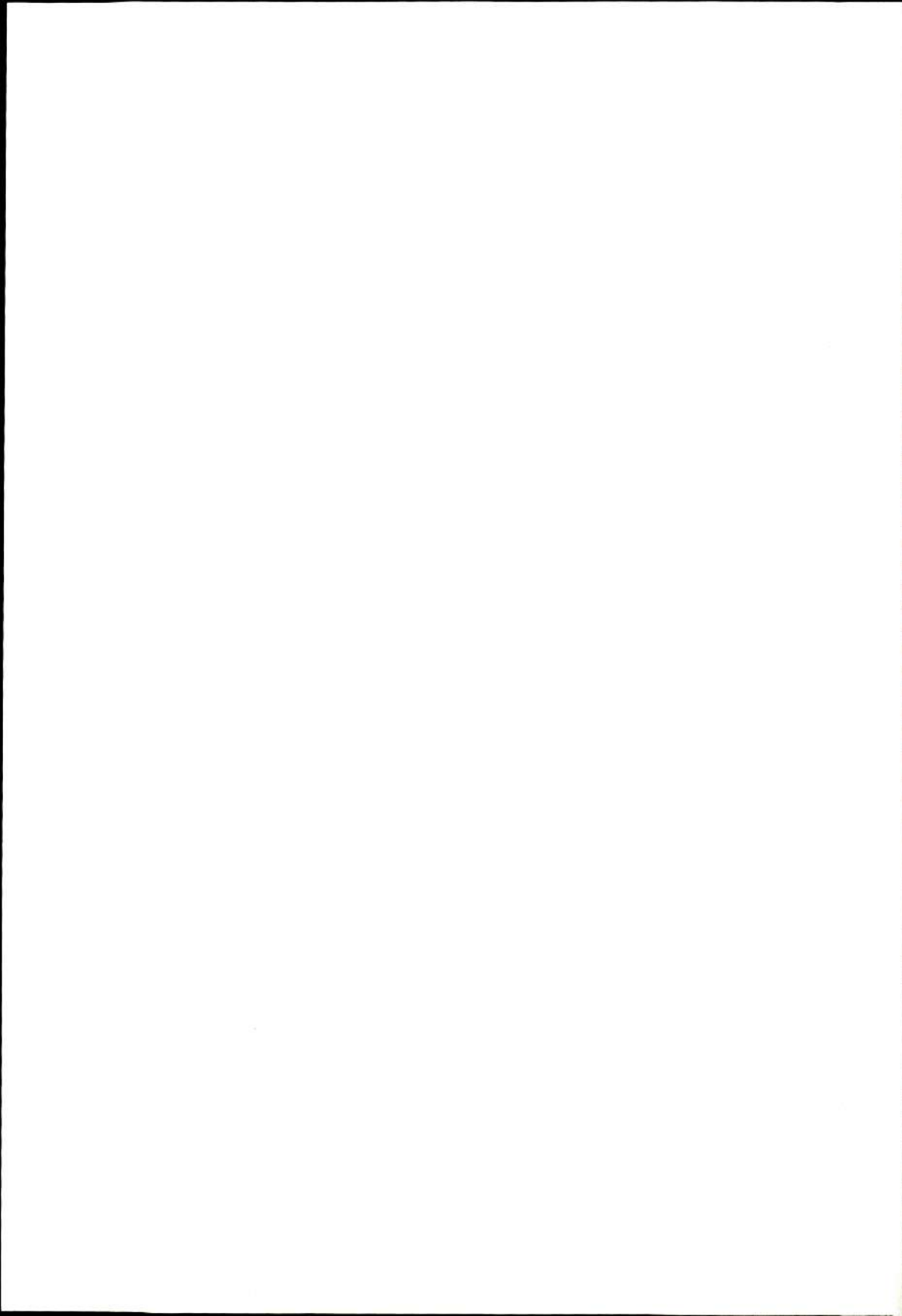
This latter point implies a change of viewpoint to allow the spotlight to fall on the many "faces" to be found in Latin American societies that are not given proper recognition—migrant workers, various ethnic and indigenous groups who run the whole gamut of subtly distinct subjective identities—a very different experience of being from that of the Western *laissez-faire* approach. The challenge before us is to overcome the situation of institutionalized violence not only for humane, ethical reasons but also so that this should not burgeon into an even greater violence. On the contrary, there should be opportunities created for participation and genuine development.

The proposal the region as a whole needs to discuss in every possible forum, perhaps with the support of the advanced democracies, is based on a "new social contract" which offers an escape route from the content and practices of the prevailing model's inequity and discrimination. Among other things, but at bedrock, this means building and maintaining a political power that, on the basis of an efficient state, can promote growth by fostering a more democratic decision-making process, foster the development of productive energies with greater investment and employment, and strengthen social progress with equitable distribution (fair shares).

Exclusion is the issue to be addressed most particularly. Besides the necessary economic, political, social, and cultural measures, the struggle against exclusion calls for the individual resources of mind and emotion to join forces with the communal resources of partnership and solidarity.

The churches, together with all human beings of good will are invited to the feast, to take part in this task which embraces economic, social, spiritual, and ethical issues.

The churches and all people of good will who inhabit the earth must make a joint effort to put forward solutions which can prevent and avoid disputes which derive from injustice and inequity. There is a pressing need to adopt a basic assumption for this policy, namely, integrated planning for harmonious, equitable coexistence between and among peoples and nations. Otherwise, world society may find itself speeding towards greater discriminatory violence which will endanger peace and closer world unity.



Churches as Places of Integration and Healing

Martin Junge¹

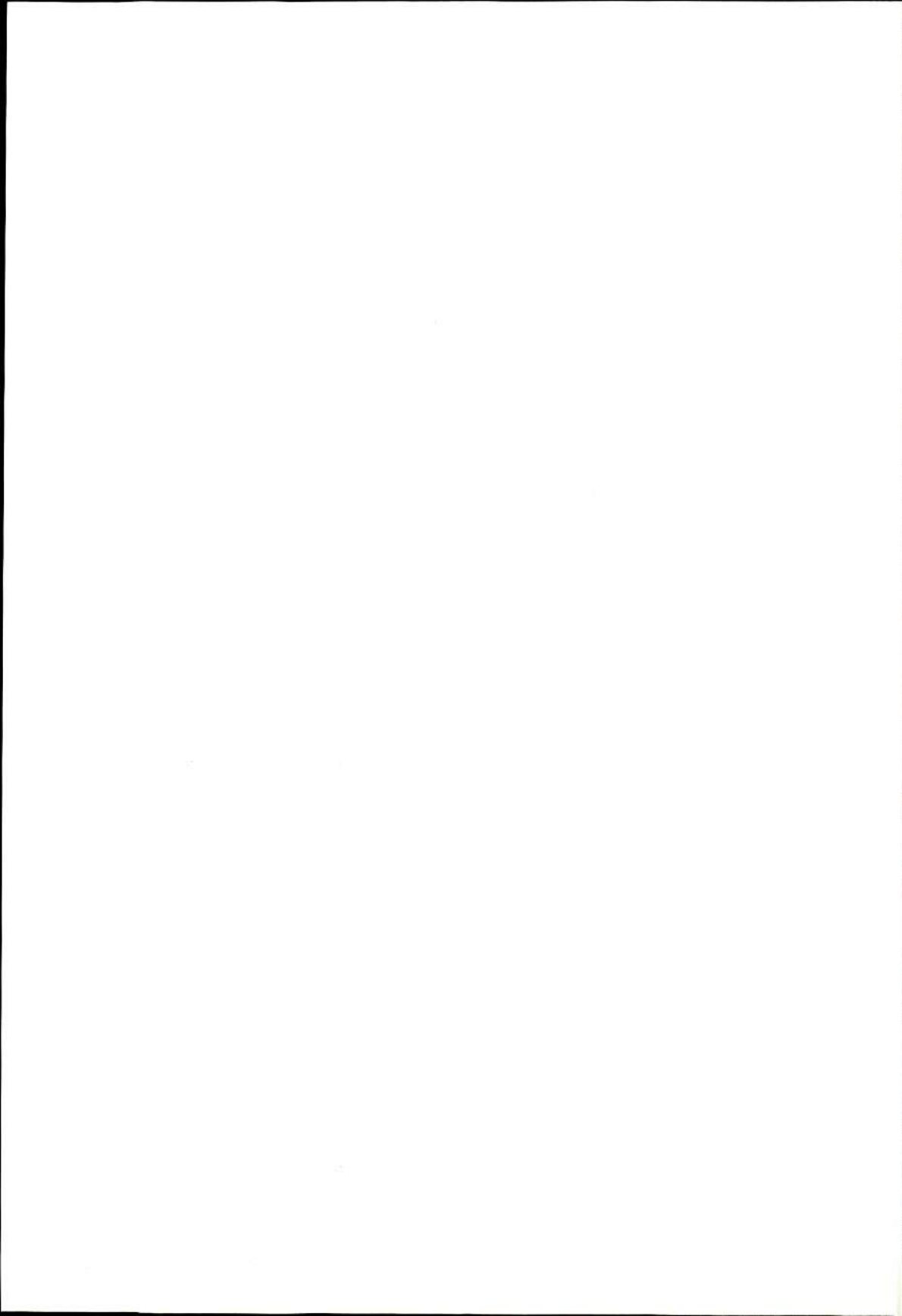
In many respects Mario J. Yutzis' paper is relevant as we continue our reflections on the Lutheran churches in the context of Latin America.

Yutzis rightly refers to the fact that more recent developments have seriously aggravated the continent's social problems. This, in turn, means that more so than ever before the churches in Latin America are faced by a challenging task in the area of diaconia. Ever more people are dropping out of the productive sector and as a consequence not only experience a paralyzing material need but are questioning the sense and value of their own lives. It is paradoxical that macro-economic data register economic progress and increased affluence.

While the term "exclusion" used by Yutzis in this connection is particularly pertinent, more attention could have been paid to the victims of this exclusion, namely, women, youths, and children. Mention must be made at this point of the increased violence against women, and of the fact that 30 percent of Santiago's officially unemployed (11 percent) are youths. This has direct consequences for the witness and life of the churches. Local congregations are indeed trying to become places of integration and healing (*comunidades inclusivas y terapéuticas*). The 1998 motto of the Lutheran Church in Brazil, "*Aqui voce tem lugar*" (Here there is room for you) is an expression of this attempt.

Finally, to my mind the theory that the present economic model has an increasingly destructive effect on social order and fabric is of great significance for the churches for two reasons. On the one hand the churches are, of course, still an integral part of this order and fabric, while on the other claiming to being or becoming new community. This is where the concept of *communio* is extremely powerful. Developing the power of communion is one of the main challenges facing the churches in Latin America today.

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"Ministries in Partnership": Proposals for the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil (ECLCB)¹

1. Analysis

1.1. The real situation in our country is marked by extensive, radical changes. The high degree of internal migration indicates that many people are in search of better living conditions. The speed and extent of urbanization are uncontrollable and this gives rise to many different expectations, necessities, and challenges. As churches, we still find it very difficult to adapt our work to the challenges and to offer suitable, diverse forms of ministry. A large proportion of the population is threatened by uprooting and has lost the support of past traditions. The process of impoverishment creates a growing mass of poor and marginalized people. Simultaneously, the steam roller of advertisements incites people to increase their consumption of goods, including religion. Our church is naturally also affected by the reality of this context.

1.2. Many of our congregations still see themselves as associations. This mentality originated in the rural areas where German immigrants founded churches. You pay your dues in order to receive a service.

1.3. The pastor is a kind of "master of ceremonies." The life of the congregation revolves around him. Nothing happens in the congregation without him. This "pastor-centrism" makes team work among colleagues and other church workers—Christian education teachers, deacons, and deaconesses—difficult. In addition, it is an obstacle to the involvement of lay people, or may even prevent it.

1.4. Congregational life appears to be predominantly closed, cold, and ready made. Communication becomes one-sided; it takes place in only one direction. Joys and sorrows are rarely shared. There is a lack of greater solidarity.

1.5. A congregational life of this type has little missionary impact. It does not attract people. There is no contact with those outside. People find it hard to cross social and cultural barriers and engage in mission beyond their own borders. The parochial structure makes mission still more difficult.

¹ Adopted by the synod of the ECLCB in 1994.

2. A Biblical, Confessional View of the Congregation, the Ministry and Ministries

2.1. Matthew describes Jesus' mission as a dynamic mission when he says, "Jesus went throughout Galilee." He describes the ministry of Jesus as having three aspects: teaching, preaching, and healing (Mt 4:23; 9:35).

2.2. The service performed by Jesus is seen by Matthew as the source of the church's mission. It consists of being salt and light for the world. Mission takes place in the way in which the local church lives (*cf.* Mt 5:13-16) and simultaneously by going out of one's own house and overcoming borders and obstacles (*cf.* Mt 28:18-20). Matthew refers to this double mission in the plural and thus conveys that mission is not just a matter for specialists but also the task of the whole congregation.

2.3. Right from baptism we are members of the church. By baptism, Christ makes us part of God's vast family (Eph 2:19), of the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12-13). In him we have direct access to God. We do not need another mediator (1 Tim 2:5). Indeed, we are a holy people and a royal priesthood to proclaim the marvelous deeds of God (1 Pet 2:9).

2.4. As the body of Christ, God's family, and the people of God's own possession, the church lives in "the apostles' teaching (the Holy Scriptures), and fellowship, ...the breaking of bread and the prayers." (Acts 2:42) The life of the local church flows from worship and leads back to worship. In this sense, the threads of all the groups and branches of activity come together in the congregation gathered for worship. At worship, the congregation accepts the service which God performs for it; and at the same time it celebrates the signs of the anticipation of God's sovereign rule. Thus, the congregation is strengthened to serve God in the world with its whole life (Rom 12:1).

2.5. This service (worship) of God in the world in which we live is also described as a ministry (*diaconia* or service). Paul talks about the ministry-service of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18). It is a task given not only to a few specialists but to the whole congregation. Here again we should note the plural, "has given *us* the ministry."

2.6. In order to help the church recognize, accept, and exercise its service-ministry better, God calls people to specific tasks (such as apostles, prophets, evangelists), "to equip the saints for the work of ministry." (Eph 4:11-12) So these people exercise particular ministries. In the ECLCB at present we have three such specific ministries: the teaching, diaconic, and pastoral ministries.

2.7. The number of particular ministries depends on the possibilities and necessities of the church. Hence, a new specific ministry can be established if the situation so demands and allows. One example of this can be found in the early church in Jerusalem, which created the ministry of deacon (Acts 6). This example shows clearly that a specific ministry is nothing other than a

development of the general ministry of witnessing to the love of God in word and deed. It also makes clear that the diaconic ministry is not something fundamentally different from the ministry of preaching. They are linked in one way or another. It is nevertheless appropriate to distinguish between them and to identify clearly what is specific to each ministry. Otherwise, everyone would do the same thing and none would devote themselves to their specific tasks.

2.8. We have recognized that our parochial structure is not helpful for mission beyond the borders of the parish. For this reason there is increasing emphasis in the ECLCB on the need to create a "missionary ministry." This ministry should be sufficiently mobile and flexible to "go out of the house" and create church anew.

2.9. The diversity of specific ministries exists to serve the various needs of the body better and to develop the different gifts to their best advantage. Specific ministries are not an end in themselves. They are all functional and instrumental in nature. They exist in order to serve the body of Christ. Christ is the head of the body (Eph 5:23; Col 1:18). Therefore it is not right for the pastor to be the "boss" of the team of ministers and church workers, he or she should rather be one among others. To the extent to which all submit to the lordship of Christ, brotherly and sisterly cooperation will be a reality (Eph 5:21).

2.10. No specific ministry exists to perform services in place of the congregation. The most important task of the four ministries is not so much to devote themselves to teaching, social service, mission and pastoral work as to assist the lay people so that they can participate in the work in particular fields. So the four ministries rely on the further training of leaders for particular areas. They are all intended for a congregation which wants to be structured as a tool for God's mission in the world. We need congregations which are active in a wide variety of ways with the largest possible number of groups and persons working together. To this end, the cooperation and leadership of lay people are of basic importance.

2.11. In practice in a local congregation lay people can be given responsibility for ministry in the following activities and groups: youth, women's organization, visiting, support for the bereaved and widows, music, administration, groups of married couples, preparation for confirmation, religious education in schools, caretaking, liturgical groups for worship, and so on.

2.12. Through the church, God ordains each Christian at the moment of baptism to witness to God's love in the family, at work, and in society. In order to exercise a particular public ministry of leadership (whether this entails employment or not), it is necessary for the individual to be properly ordained by God through the church (*cf. Confessio Augustana XIV*). Ordination can be given to anyone who has an inner and outer call and has undergone the necessary training and evaluation. The church ordains in God's name to ministries in the context of the church (such as the four ministries mentioned). The

congregation ordains in God's name and on behalf of the church to ministries at the local level (*cf.* 2.11).

2.13. The aim of all these ministries is to enable a local church to evolve into one which is more welcoming, has more solidarity, is therapeutic, open, integrative, and thus generally missionary. A congregation of this kind exists to praise and adore God, as a blessing for the world and for its own joy.

3. How Can We Have Congregations Like That?

3.1. The three ministries which exist in the ECLCB need to be defined anew. In addition, the missionary ministry needs to be created. Ideally, these four ministers would work together in partnership as a team. The team would be coordinated by the person with that gift, irrespective of the particular ministry they hold. Any one of the four can be the coordinator. For the team to function well, it is necessary for each member to be aware of being under the lordship of Christ and for each of the four ministries to be defined in relation and in contradistinction to the others on the basis of the universal and unique ministry which Christ has entrusted to the church.

The following is an attempt to define the four ministries along these lines.

3.1.1. Christian education teachers bear special responsibility for teaching the faith in schools and congregations and in other educational fields. Their main task is not so much to give religious instruction as to equip and accompany teachers and other educators. Their work will be planned in consultation with the other ministers and the presbyters or elders.

3.1.2. The pastors bear special responsibility for worship and church rites, pastoral care, and fraternal discipline. Pastors have special competence on questions in the theological field; with regard to issues in other realms they should be prepared to accept advice. Since pastors have to deal with many different groups in a congregation, it is necessary for them to have the gift of helping people work through conflicts, of reconciliation in disputes, and of motivating church workers for leadership tasks. The pastors should be relieved of administrative responsibilities so that they can devote themselves mainly to equipping and accompanying lay people in their ministries (*cf.* 2.11). The activities of the pastor will be planned in consultation with the other ministries and the elders or presbyters.

3.1.3. The diaconic ministers have special responsibility for physical and material needs, although needs of other kinds can also not be ignored. Here too it should be remembered that the holders of these ministries are not primarily "managers" but rather motivators and multipliers. The diaconic ministry aims at a therapeutic congregation which has eyes and ears for suffering. It is concerned about healing and prevention and endeavors to remove the

causes of suffering. Its work will be planned in consultation with the other ministers and the presbyters or elders.

3.1.4. The missionaries have special responsibility for missionary activity "to the outside," beyond the borders of the parochial life of the congregation and its regular activities. Their work can be considered to include evangelization and the establishment of new congregations beyond the borders of the parish. Their main task is not so much to engage in mission as to equip the "lay priesthood" for this mission and provide support. Where geographically possible, their activity will also be planned in consultation with the other ministries and the presbyters or elders.

The four ministries therefore set store by the equipping of lay people to accept responsibility in the various fields to encourage congregational structures which will promote the development of mission.

3.2. The consequence of defining the four ministries as means and multipliers is the necessity to re-evaluate the education policy of the ECLCB. It must be adapted to the new conception of the ministries. The training institutions and representatives of the congregations must share in the process. This procedure will also serve as a trial run for a future, regular exchange between the training institutions of the ECLCB.

3.3. There is an urgent necessity to examine whether it is possible and appropriate for the four ministries to be exercised on a part-time basis. The suggestion is not only being discussed for financial reasons but also for reasons of content, quality, and communication. It may be a way of increasing their missionary effect.

3.4. The ordering of the church must be revised in such a way that all four ministries have an equal share in the advisory and administrative bodies of the church.

In the course of adapting the basic provisions, it will be necessary to introduce the category "pastor's position in preparation." Such a position will have its own statutes even if it is not yet a legal entity. It will be considered a pastoral post but not yet be subject to all the financial requirements.

3.5. Because of the definition of the four ministries as tools and multipliers, there is a necessity to invest in lay ministries. In order to talk about "lay ministries" it will be necessary to provide a minimum of training and the appropriate recognition. Without some qualification and without being publicly called, the authority of a lay worker will not be recognized. In order to meet the demand for training for people who are to undertake the responsibility for such lay ministries in local congregations, the ECLCB can take advantage of the training possibilities which already exist at various levels in the church. In all cases the official recognition must be granted by the ECLCB. This will include a final certificate and an act of induction as essential requirements for exercising a particular ministry.

To this end a liturgical handbook must be compiled which also includes the laying on of hands in analogy to the rite of ordination.

The field in which these "lay ministries" work will be determined and delimited by the body which issues the call and also by the level of qualification reached. Separate discussion will be required on the related details.

3.6. The implementation of the proposals for "ministries in partnership" must liberate itself from the fetters of "traditionalism" and, at the same time, resist a mere "modernism" which betrays its own identity.

The strategy for new developments needs calm, patience, and courage. With regard to a reform of the education policy and the introduction of new ministries, goals must be set for the short, medium, and long term.

A Vision for the 21st Century

Gottfried Brakemeier

At present the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil (ECLCB) faces several challenges. Four of them stand out. The church:

- *Suffers the consequences of internal migration within Brazil.* This results in a scattering of church members throughout Brazil which fragments the church and leads to the emergence of minute congregations in areas in which the church was not present until recently. The church spreads, but does not grow in actual numbers. The new as well as the old congregations will only survive if they develop missionary strength and learn to integrate persons who historically were not members of the church.
- *Suffers the consequences of urbanization.* As a rule, migrants end up in the cities and the ECLCB of the future will be a predominantly urban church. This demands a transformation of mentalities and structural adaptation. In the cities the members of the church are faced with anonymity, marginalization, religious pluralism, and a relativization of traditional values. For the time being, it is a predominately rural church and must find a way of being church in the large cities for which it needs flexible structures.
- *Suffers the consequences of the impoverishment of the overwhelming majority of the population, including its members.* It must define the place of the poor in the congregation and try to overcome the polarization of the "classes." How can we realize communion in a divided society? Furthermore, the impoverishment limits its resources and, as a consequence, its range of activities.
- *Is experiencing the inevitable process of indigenization,* moving from being a church of German immigrants to being an increasingly multi-ethnic church. Increasingly it inserts itself into its social context, leaving a ghetto in order to articulate itself as a Brazilian church. This process affects its identity. If ethnicity and tradition lose strength the ECLCB must define its identity in strictly confessional terms. It has no future as a purely ethnic church.

These challenges make it imperative to find a vision for the 21st century. It is necessary to work out a concept of a Lutheran church amidst the social transformation which is taking place in Brazil.

There are several possible corresponding ecclesiological models. The church could:

- *Continue to rely on the model of the traditional congregation*, which is rather like a club, rendering certain recreational or other service. This model must not be underestimated as it has proved to be feasible and capable of mirroring the communion of saints, including the creation of the organization necessary to fulfill the church's mission. Nevertheless, without a profound modification, this model will not do justice to the demands of the future.
- *Could take the grassroots communities as its frame of reference*, which is the ecclesiological model of liberation theology. The congregation unites around a just cause that is inherent to the liberation of the oppressed. The church that corresponds to this model is a prophetic one. The ECLCB has assumed elements of this ecclesiology by advocating for instance agrarian reform, social justice, citizens' rights, and ethics in politics. Nonetheless, liberation spirituality also led to conflicts within the church since its congregations are not exactly grassroots communities. Above all, the questions remains as to what actually constitutes the evangelical congregation. While the prophetic element is important, is it really sufficient?
- *Could emulate the Pentecostal model*. In Brazil the Pentecostal churches are growing at a breathtaking pace, apparently meeting people's vital needs. While offering an alternative space to the depressing world of the urban dwellers there remain highly dubious aspects to this phenomenon, such as the radical separation of church and world, or, the promise of prosperity. Whereas the Lutheran church certainly has something to learn from Pentecostalism it must be critical.
- *Could try to be a rigidly confessional church*. But, what does that mean? Confessionalism is out of the question and would certainly not be attractive to the people. Rather, it must articulate an ecclesiological model with a clear profile on the basis of its theological heritage and pay attention to the needs arising from its context. For that purpose it can learn from other ecclesiologies, of which there are more than mentioned above. The evangelical movement's proposal is close to that of pietism, not to mention the Roman Catholic ecclesiology. A simple emulation is not possible. Significant steps have already been taken towards a Lutheran ecclesiology within the Brazilian reality, but the process has not yet been concluded.

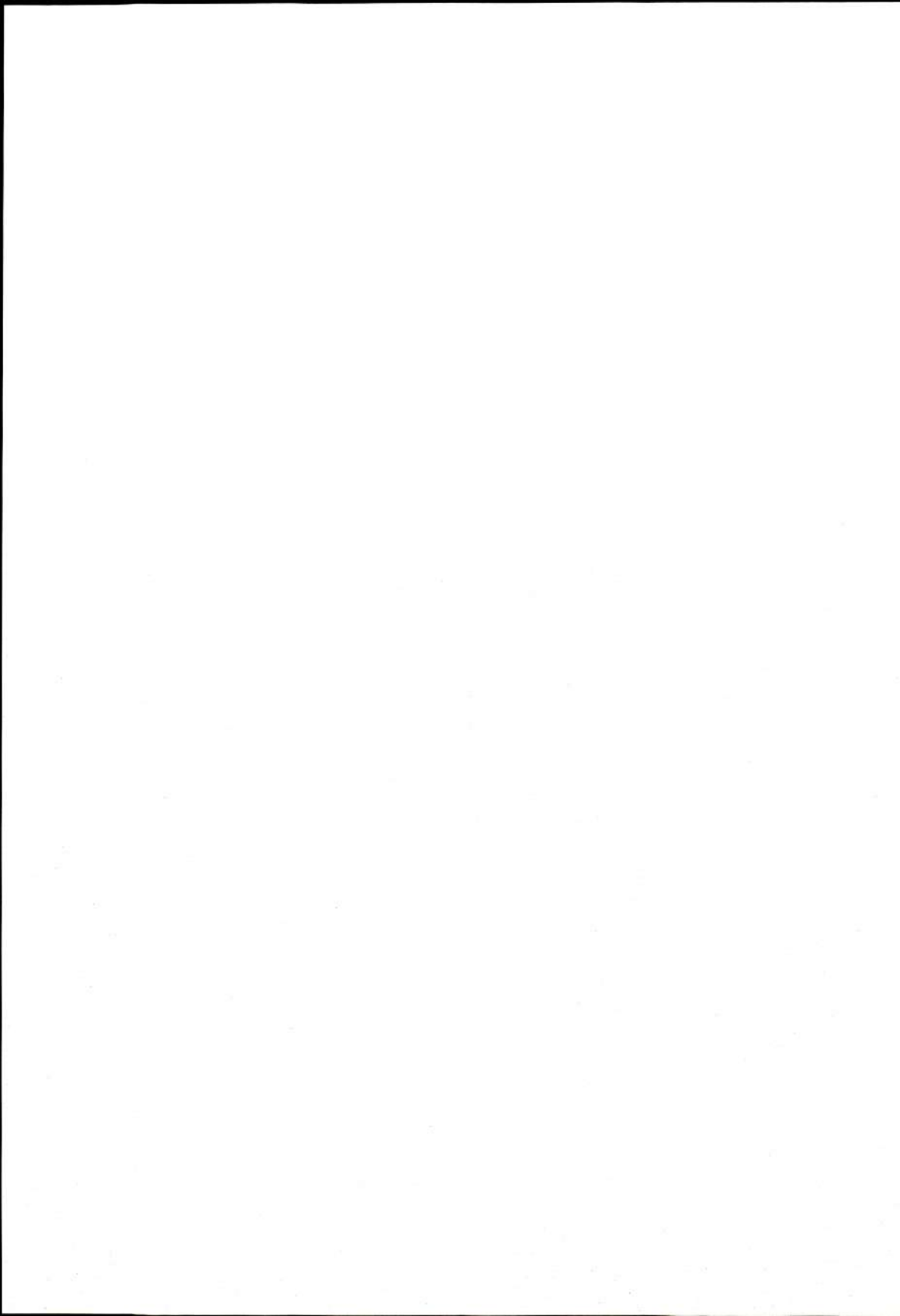
During any discussion of these matters a recourse to theological sources is important and the contextual realities must be included in the reflection. In the following I shall mention three issues that must be taken into account.

- *How do gospel and market relate?* Here I am referring in particular to the religious market. Certainly the gospel is not going to submit to the laws of the market, but it cannot ignore people's longings. Lutherans must open up their eyes and ears to these needs as is shown in the parable of the Good Samaritan. The needs are many and their standardization would be detri-

mental to the church's mission. The church must diversify the spectrum of what it offers in order to reach the various segments of society, without losing the evangelical coherence or consistency of its discourse and practice.

- *How can we make communion concrete in a world divided according to class, ethnic group, race, and gender?* We have already deplored the prevailing individualism in our societies as well as the corresponding lack of solidarity. The congregation of Jesus Christ is inclusive by nature. How can we counteract the various forms of "exclusivism," "corporatism," and "party politics"? It is vital that we recover the original meaning of community.
- *What is the relationship between confessionality and catholicity?* While it needs an internal *magnus consensus* that guarantees its identity, the ECLCB must reconcile itself with its ecumenicity. What is the Lutheran concept for Brazilian society comprising also an ecumenical and religious world? I am convinced that the ECLCB has an enormous missionary potential that needs to be mobilized. For the time being it is a church that is too hidden, too inhibited, and too shy.

The Lutheran church is not a sect. It has an important contribution to make which is essentially the message of justification by grace through faith alone. This is the greatest provocation in history and constitutes the power to heal society's illnesses provided it is understood not only as a means to appease people's consciences but as redeeming human beings from the threat of nothingness. Justification implies dignifying the human being and the salvation from death in its many manifestations. This must be preached and lived out, it must be transformed into experience and aim at renewing people's lives and motivating them to gratitude. The people crave for authentic joy. Where can we find it but in the gospel?



The Lutheran Church in Argentina

Lisandro Orlov

In the past, members of the Lutheran church in Argentina had a denominational identity that was fervently anti-Catholic. The theological training of missionaries and the very zealous piety that in some cases led to literal or fundamentalist thinking did not allow for theological reflection about what it meant to be a Lutheran. In many instances, the Lutheran identity has emerged as a reaction to popular theology in the form of Roman Catholic roots and traditions.

Setting up Lutheran missionary churches has also brought with it a symbolic baggage which, for those new to the faith, is hard to understand without critical analysis or adjustment. Let us remember the major assertion: *lex orandi, lex credendi*, or what is said in prayer is what is believed. In this respect, the affirmation of the universal priesthood of all believers—in theory one of the most categorical denominational statements—was proclaimed in circumstances where politics was run by petty dictators or strutting chieftains. It was given the lie by the architecture of our churches, both past and present. For instance, take the difficulty of reaching the presbytery (steps, kneeling-stools, railings, and distance from the nave, to name but a few). All of this shows that the church is in practice organized from the top down in a hierarchy. Putting the people of God on benches is to make them passive observers, since that is the place for spectators or a choir that goes along with the hymns and says “Amen” to actions performed by the clergy who hold center stage.

The Church and Society

It is significant that in the 19th century Protestantism was regarded as being synonymous with greater democracy and industrialization. Those latter virtues were seen by the political and cultural groups concerned as closely bound up in race, culture, and religion. Then the conclusion was reached that immigration had brought these qualities. This ideological outlook persisted until the mid-20th century. Society regards the Protestant churches as historically positive in the face of the social and political commitments of the Roman Catholic Church.

The moves to gain independence, and with that free-thinking followed by positivism, led to a split between progressive groups and the Roman Catholic Church. That church supported the Spanish Crown at one point against the

independence movements and subsequently established an alliance with the economically powerful and ideologically conservative. That alliance was ended with Pius XII's rule in the mid-20th century. Vatican Council II transformed the message of the Roman Catholic Church and took a number of political, social, and even theological banners that had previously been in Protestant hands. Since that time, the initiative has not been regained.

The Lutheran church today, more often than not, remains silent in the face of tremendously serious problems. Or it adopts positions which are as inherently conservative as those of some Roman Catholic groups. This attitude is quite apparent in many of the deaconry projects undertaken by congregations. These projects are generally in areas that do not discuss the social, economic, or political structure of society.

One of the biblical studies submitted at the Ninth Latin American Lutheran Congress clearly called into question the motives underlying the deaconry projects. The stance taken is always slightly superior as though the church stood outside or on the sidelines of the situations it would like to change. Rarely does the church see itself as part of poverty. It is hard to understand that Jesus saw the poor, the excluded, and the marginalized as those who bring the gospel to the church. This idea that the poor and rejected are evangelists is as scandalous a notion to believers today as it was to Jesus Christ's contemporaries.

All the examples given in the New Testament used to illustrate deaconry responsibilities are based on participation of the excluded and marginalized (lepers, eunuchs, prostitutes, tax-collectors or publicans, Samaritans, widows) whose actions were a challenge to society and religious groups. In this regard, we have to embrace what was said by Martin Luther, namely, that if there is really any good in us, it is none other than a gift of God; and if it is a gift of God, it is owed to love alone, in other words, to the law of Christ. If it is owed to love, it must be used not to serve my own interests but to serve others.

Tension Between Theory and Practice

The Lutheran church in Argentina has always seen itself as a church open to all cultures and with a special concern for making the gospel culturally part of the social structures. That was the theory. In practice, the guidelines and criteria shaped in other cultures took primacy over Argentine popular religious feeling which was always rejected without consideration.

It is not enough to learn Spanish if we do not grasp its spirit. We must inwardly digest the Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture where it is asserted that:

Christian worship relates dynamically to culture in at least four ways.
First, it is transcultural, the same substance for everyone everywhere,

beyond culture. Second, it is contextual, varying according to the local situation (both nature and culture). Third, it is counter-cultural, challenging what is contrary to the Gospel in a given culture. Fourth, it is cross-cultural, making possible sharing between different local cultures. In all four dynamics, there are helpful principles which can be identified.¹

This task has not been completed with regard to celebrating the liturgy and establishing identity.

The Church's Response to the Main Social Issues

As someone responsible for the Pastoral Ecu mica y Solidaria con las Personas que Viven con VIH-SIDA (Ecumenical Pastoral Mission of Solidarity with those living with HIV-AIDS), I want to finish by looking at the experience of work done on the fringes of the Christian community.

Most importantly, we learnt that this work has nothing to do with compassion or mercy. Those are not the feelings that prompt pastoral action. We firmly believe that we are driven by the wounded dignity of so many people; people who have been wounded both by society and by the church itself. Pastoral work among people with HIV-AIDS is based on our understanding of justice. We believe that this is valid also for other forms of pastoral action. This epidemic has taught us that the real sick who need to be cured are not the patients we take to hospital. The sick who need to be cured are the members of society and the churches. That is where we have to do our pastoral work. In the hospitals, we go to listen and to learn, in brief, to be evangelized by the excluded and marginalized who open up our hearts, minds, and lives. AIDS has emerged as an eminently theological and ecclesiological issue since it challenges our concepts of the nature of God and the inclusiveness of the church. The idea of the punishment of God, confusion between medical diagnosis and moral analysis, the relationship between sickness and sin have shown up the fact that our vision of God is not based on the Scriptures. Very often, what we say follows what is said around us in the society in which we live and has very little biblical foundation.

¹ "Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture: Contemporary Challenges and Opportunities," in S. Anita Stauffer (ed.), *Christian Worship: Unity in Cultural Diversity*, LWF Studies 1/1996 (Geneva: LWF), p. 24.

The Lutheran Church in Chile

Manuel Ossa

Religion and Self-interest

One of the aberrations Luther fought in the church of his day was its power and wealth. In his writings addressed to the German nobility he said that the church should extricate itself from worldly power and, if it did not do so of its own accord, it must be made to do so.

This demand was basically prompted by Luther's experience of God. As far as he was concerned, religion could have no other center but God and God's glory, and no human interest could supplant it, not even salvation itself, far less material self-seeking such as gaining riches and the wielding of power. According to Luther,

Those who do not seek their own pleasure serve God solely for God's sake and not for worldly goods. Even if they knew there were no Heaven and no Hell, no reward, they would still serve God for His own sake.¹

In today's Chile, a society based on self-interest seeks material gain from everything, even religion. At times, religion itself seems to operate like a business; religion is expected to promote the material prosperity of those who practice it.

One of the interests human beings have in religion is that it can bring us closer to established power. There is a feeling that all power is linked to that of God or flows from God's power. Perhaps that is the very reason why no church, except in the first few centuries of Christianity, has failed to forge links with the corridors of power. It is one of the temptations facing all churches in Chile today. "What is proper to any religion (is) to put itself in God's place, identify God's cause as its own, God's law with its own," "they know not what they do," "considering that they worship God when in fact they are confusing honoring God with their own desire for power."²

¹ In *De servo arbitrio*, G. W. XXII, 133s., quoted by Philip S. Watson, *Let God be God* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1947).

² Joseph Moingt, *L'homme qui venait de Dieu*, vol. II (Paris: Editions du Cerf), p. 180. This general assertion is linked to the sin which religion committed against Jesus. Immediately preceding we read that "Sin is every sequestration of God's divinity, every usurpation of His sovereignty, every attempt to lay hand on Him and use Him, confine Him in a place and prevent Him from being the All-Other. This was the sin, the paradigm of all sin, committed against Jesus by some men of religion who 'know not what they do' precisely because they have been deceived by it."

This is a difficult subject since some assistance which comes from the authorities seems to fit so well with the preaching of the gospel. It opens the doors of hospitals, prisons, and schools, and arranges the propagation of the gospel through press and television. These are perhaps all good reasons, and churches have run to the lobbies of the National Congress when the law governing religion was discussed. These are reasons which can be debated one by one. Some day, it will have to be done, and then—this could be the contribution of the Lutheran church—from the standpoint of the cross.

If we are to draw conclusions from Luther's theology which go beyond his practice (which was not always consistent with his theology), then we would have to be convinced that the God Jesus preached is not the God of power. On the contrary, he is the God who reveals himself on, and at the same time is hidden in, the cross of Christ Jesus. The "theology of the cross"—set out in Luther's Heidelberg Theses of 1518—is central to Luther's work, not in the sense that his spirituality fed on suffering nor that he ignored other aspects of Jesus' human history. But in that the entire life and work of Jesus is permeated by the idea that the cross was at once the dissimulation and the revelation of God. In his commentary on Galatians, Luther writes that, "true Christian religion...does not begin, as do other religions, with the highest, but with the lowest."³

That God is hidden in the cross of Christ relates to the scandalous fact of the cross itself, an act of injustice, where God is on the side of the victim. This is not the place where human beings would normally seek God. On the contrary, they would tend to look for him in manifestations of power. The fact that God is to be found in the victim of the cross is a stumbling block, not only to reason but far more so to the practice of all the churches.

A Lutheran church that wants to serve God and contribute to Christian testimony in Chile today has to be one which resolutely turns away from seeking power and decides to act differently, to take some other path, although to do so may make it seem less effective. If we really believe in the strength of the Spirit, the energy of God which raised Jesus Christ from the dead, then we will not need to impose religion by appealing to the self-seeking material interests of those to whom we preach the gospel, nor will we seek the help of established power to maintain the church's financial or administrative structures. The effectiveness of the Christian church cannot be measured by the number of its members, nor by how frequently it is referred to in the media, nor by the number of its representatives in parliament, on councils or serving in the armed forces. In fact, like the mustard seed bears no proportion to the branches of the fully grown tree, its effectiveness cannot be measured. The kingdom of God comes through the power

³ *Op. cit.*, (note 1).

of the Spirit, and in order for that Spirit to work, it is enough that we commit ourselves, as Jesus did, to restoring dignified, just human relations in solidarity. This must be done in the name of the God of Jesus, who is the God we find if we eagerly undertake this task.

Authority and Freedom

Today, there is much talk about various forms of freedom: a free market, a free press, freedom of opinion. Nonetheless, we do not know what to do with a freedom that is more proclaimed, such as the free market, than real, such as the freedom of the individual. To fill the void left by this lip service paid to freedom, people look to authorities and models to bring quietus. That is why masters and gurus emerge. Hence the illumination sought in the occult forces of nature or the influence of the stars. Moreover that is why there are pastors who shout on the radio or from the pulpit and seek to affirm their own authority in a literal or fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible.

While our Chilean society is an authoritarian one, having conceded to being governed by a dictatorship for 17 years, it is also one which is rudderless, without direction because of the failure of all the "authorities" previously at the helm. There is a great temptation, therefore, to follow new autocratic leaders blindly, be they religious or political.

In Luther's time, the external authority of the church, that of civic power and legal experts, superseded the human being's relationship to God.

To find our way in life, with faith alone, grace alone, and only Christ, Luther offers two additional assertions:

- First, radical reliance on the Word of God as sufficient. "Only the Scriptures" is the rudder or steering mechanism for existence and it is self-explanatory.
- Second, conviction of one's own conscience.

By extension, and with the contribution of contemporary thinking and practice, and the addition of the Bible and one's own conscience, we must mention the communication factor. Church as community needs a critical exchange of opinion. That means examining ideas and discussing them together. In democratically exercised criticism and discernment, suspicious of any pastor or politician who wishes to play guru, chief or spiritual guide, is where guidance can be sought and where the Bible has something to say to those who look for God in it.

Here is where the Lutheran legacy of biblical interpretation can help liberate and guide Chilean society today.

Vocation and Work in the World

With regard to defending freedom and attendant rights, I should like, in closing, to highlight Luther's vision of the relationship between the individual human being and what we call worldly duties. This is what came to be called in Lutheran doctrine the "two kingdoms." Luther has no systematic doctrine of the two kingdoms. But from his writings, where he criticizes the Renaissance church, Manicheism (radical dualism), and the hotheaded political movements of his time, we can, according to Ulrich Duchrow,⁴ draw the following conclusion.

Luther makes no separation between spiritual and worldly affairs. Rather, going back to apocalyptic tradition, he shows the kingdom of God in opposition to the kingdom of the Evil One. He developed the idea of God's struggle against the enemy in two domains or "realms": that of the world and that of the spirit, as closely linked as body and soul.

The domain of the spirit is solely the work of the Spirit of God, which forms the true church, justifies every individual justification, and prepares eternal life. This spiritual domain is not to be confused with any church institution since the true church is hidden and spiritual.

For life in the world and the fight against evil, God has endowed human beings with reason, which is a sharing in the goodness and truth of God himself. It is the individual Christian's worldly duty to practice his or her vocation: *Beruf ist Berufung* (profession is vocation). Duty is no lesser than the monastic life. In social affairs, God uses institutions such as the church (but with the gift of God not the exercise of power or privilege), politics (with the gift of reason and the "strange" use of the "sword"), and the economy (where once again the gift of reason comes in).

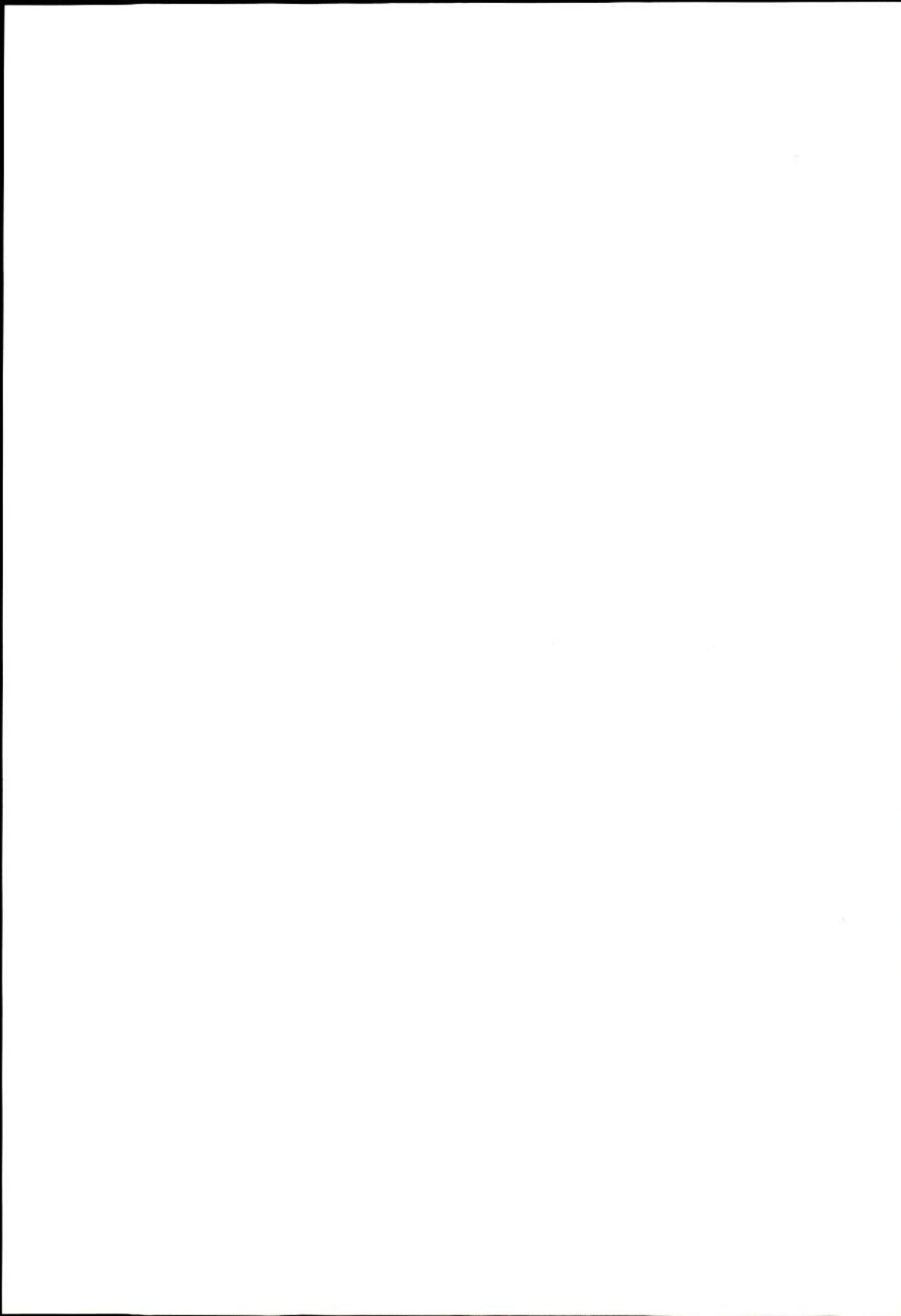
The distinction between the two "realms" or domains is not, then, adversarial, as between the two "kingdoms." It is complementary, with no mingling, between the direct action of God and the human individual and social works. With this distinction, there can be no identifying any human "work" (such as Manicheism or the political intervention of the church) with the action of God. Human work is carried on as a result of the use of reason and its final purpose is to combat the individual, political and social effects of sin. But, although directed to the kingdom of God, no human work can take the name of God to justify its existence or make claims. Hence, Luther, who initially inspired the movement of Thomas Münster's peasants, later distanced himself from the warlike struggle of that enlightened pastor.⁵

⁴ Cf. Ulrich Duchrow (ed.), *Zwei Reiche und Regimente* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1977), pp.11-17.

⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 22. It should be noted that since the 19th century, Luther's thinking has been distorted by transferring his dualism of the two kingdoms to his distinction between the two realms: the realm of the spirit and the realm of the world, as though Luther had separated the

In a country such as Chile where, on the one hand, people are disillusioned with politics and on the other there is so much to be done to safeguard human rights and for a so-called "protected democracy" to start becoming a genuine participatory democracy, any Christian church such as the Lutheran church has an important part to play in encouraging and supporting members to participate in building a civic society, according to their individual vocation. That worldly task is a divine calling with no dividing line but also no merging or mingling.

two. As a result, Luther's teachings has been interpreted in such a way that a division has been made between life which is personal, individual, internal, involving conscience, piety—the domain or realm of the spirit—on the one hand and, on the other, life which is objective, natural, involving duty, law—the realm of the world, and Christianity has been confined to the former. So, law, economy, and politics would be worldly, or even pagan, matters (R. Sohm) and are autonomous (*Eigengesetzlichkeit*, M. Weber) and matters where the Sermon on the Mount has nothing to say. This interpretation of Luther's teachings has had a serious effect on all sides whenever Lutheran churches have failed to criticize allegedly "autonomous" state powers and reasons of state that have trampled basic human rights underfoot, such as Hitler's Germany in the 1930s or South Africa's apartheid regime. It is true that Luther seemed to lay the foundation for this erroneous interpretation by defending freedom of conscience and religion against the princes, arguing that these freedoms belonged to the realm of the spirit and could not fall within the purview of the prince; or in giving instructions, for instance, concerning support for the princes to the order, visiting and management of churches. This shows either some inconsistency between practice and doctrine or else indicates a doctrine which, on this point, has been insufficiently developed. Cf. F. W. Kantzenbach, *Christentum in der Gesellschaft*, vol. 2, p. 3.



Faith and Hope

Ivoni Richter Reimer

I would like to reflect on several aspects of a multifarious reality. It is as impossible to speak about Brazilian society as it is to speak about this church. Each concept and practice has its own history and its own historical universe of ideas. Each person with whom we work and live is part of the complicated process whereby we have inherited our tradition, our culture, congregational life, and our "being church." Thus we have expectations, often not explicitly expressed, regarding the role of the church and pastoral work. Diversity is great, and our expectations depend on our framework of analysis. If our framework is the heritage of a Lutheran tradition linked to a certain German identity, then our expectations will correspond to that and will have a strong ethnic component. If our frame of reference is a Lutheran tradition linked to the Word of God that is incarnate in our daily lives, then our expectation will have a stronger socio-cultural component. In this complex process of forming one's identity there may be disruptions. In our midst there are many persons, "historical" Lutherans who think that "there needs to be a church" in order to have a dignified burial. For that reason it is very complicated and difficult to talk about the self-understanding of the church in society. Each person will speak on the basis of his or her experience with the church and this varies from one historical moment to another, and from one place to other.

As someone said, to talk about this topic is rather like a group of blind people groping an elephant. For one person the elephant is a wall, for the other the elephant is a tree trunk, for yet another one it is a piece of string, and for another it is a column. In other words, anything goes.

Fabio, a young, black, unemployed man, fond of studying and dreaming about studying philosophy, has been participating in our parish since November of 1998. He came from a Pentecostal church and is an active, interested member. He says that he likes Lutheran theology because he feels comfortable in the worship services. He finds himself while losing himself in the fellowship with Lutherans but he does not know whether he will stand it in terms of culture.

The fact that Fabio is with us is not a coincidence. Seven years ago our parish held an intensive seminar on the subject "we are church." We looked at where do we come from and where do we want to go, and we saw that we needed to change.

The history and the heritage of our church have resulted in a church with strong ethnic German characteristics. The members were white and middle

class, with a right-wing or center right-wing political bias. They had grown old. The missionary perspective and the concern with the church's presence in Brazilian society were not a priority. The church was quite closed in itself, rather like a club. The introvert church was hidden on the hill where it always wanted to remain hidden, a communion among brothers and sisters.

And then came the realization of a crisis, one that pointed towards the church's demise. The young did not want to be a part of this church. They had become "Brazilian" due to their socialization at school and in society. After a lot of discussion, self-criticism, reflection, and argument, one woman, a 65-year-old named Inge, summed it up: "We have got to change our mentality."

But, how does one change one's mentality? One way is through relating to the other: To get to know other people's reality, history, and culture, and what they think of us.

In partnership with a non-governmental organization that opened its doors on the outskirts of Niterôí, we began to develop a missionary-social project, "Faith and Hope." With a team comprising a psychologist, a teacher, a social worker, and a pastor, we worked in a local school with a group of children with learning difficulties and their families. We found out that the origin of the children's "problems" was to be found in misery, malnutrition, domestic violence, and dysfunctional families. The specific role of the church consisted in having a broad view of the educational process. It included living out the gospel in the lives of these people, helping them to recover their self-esteem and find their true value as persons in the image and likeness of God.

To be a church in this situation could be nothing other than witnessing in the love of God with these people, creating possibilities of relationships of *diaconia* linked to *koinonia*. Without *koinonia*, *diaconia* runs the risk of becoming merely "assistentialist." We learned that to realize *diaconia* with *koinonia*, the church has to take up its prophetic role within society. All ethics that originated from justification by grace through faith must be critical of all mechanisms that create and reproduce discrimination and in solidarity with all those who are discriminated against.

The project ran into difficulties because of a lack of facilities. The Roman Catholic Church claimed back the room that was being used, because it disapproved of a project that addressed issues such as family planning, abortion, sexuality, and AIDS. The Lutheran church did not approve our project request since it was felt that these issues needed to be dealt with by the state or secular organizations. Nevertheless, as Martin Luther said, if the state is not doing its job then the church has to take over and become "hospital or sanatorium."

Due to a lack of vision, insight, courage, and understanding the church missed the historical moment of being able to invest in a missionary activity. However the parish persevered and managed to raise sufficient funds to build a congregational center "Faith and Hope." The work continues and new possibilities of cooperation with the local government are being explored.

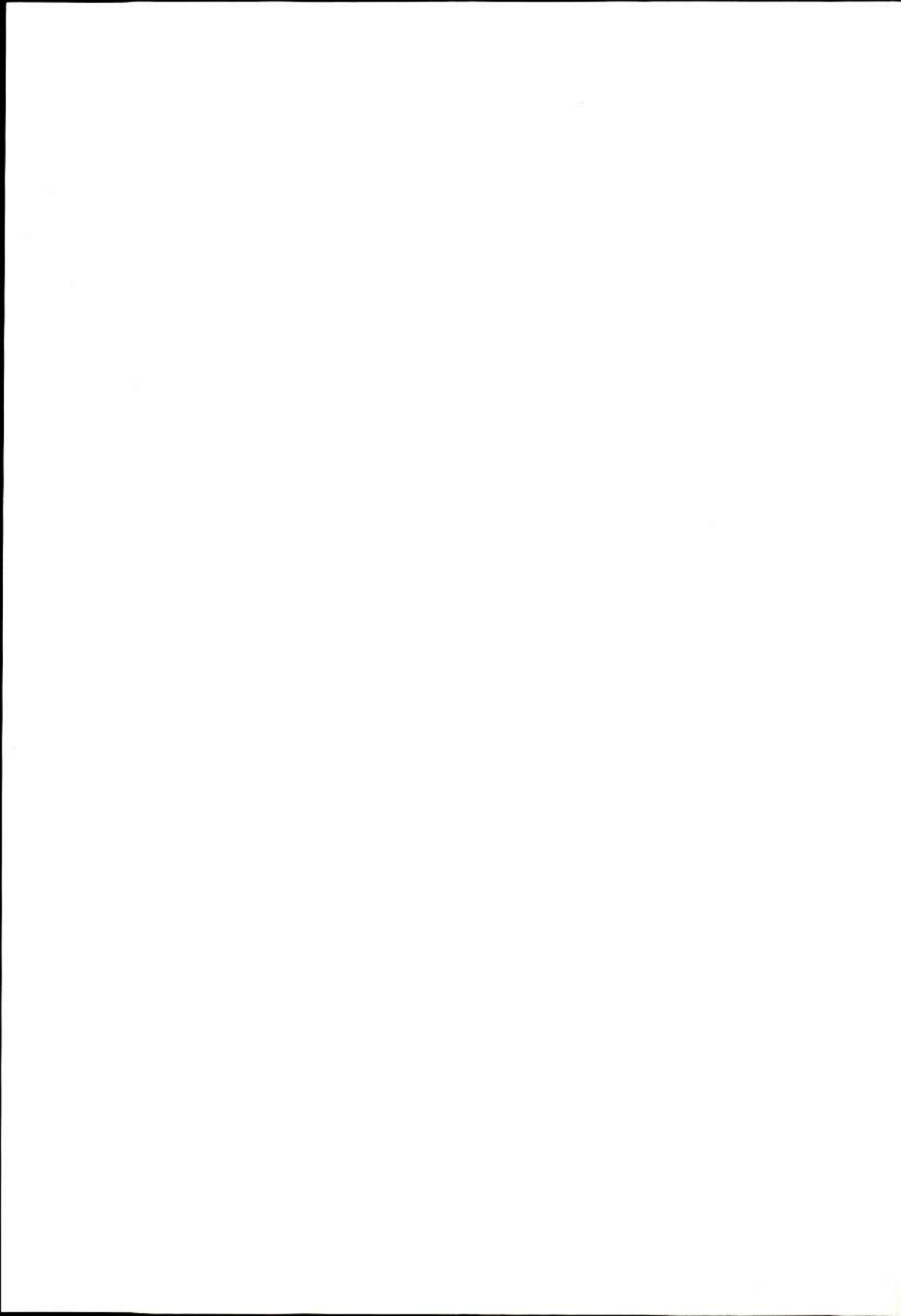
Disadvantaged black women and children are becoming part of the congregation. The process of integration is not an easy one and there is opposition as well as support in the congregation. Changing the prevalent mentality is a slow process. Practicing *koinonia* is in accordance with the will God, especially in a context such as ours.

In a country such as Brazil, with 35 million living below the poverty line, 17 million unemployed, the large-scale privatization of industry, an increasing external debt, growing criminality, drug consumption sexual violence, and so on, the church cannot but speak out against these injustices. It does not suffice that the church merely makes pronouncements but it must enable people, whether church members or not, to become citizens in the true sense.

Despite being a minority church, 250,000 people in the southern synod benefit from the church's services in terms of social and educational services. Ninety-five percent of them are not church members. Lutherans are actively participating in services to the community such as health care; social work; education; and advocacy for the homeless, landless, rural workers. As a church we can contribute substantially to the education and training of responsible citizens who by exercising their special priesthood establish visible and palpable signs of the kingdom of God.

The Brazilian church is an ecumenical church at all levels. It is a church that allows "freedom of thought and speech." It deals with its differences without jeopardizing its unity. As a democratic body it is heterogeneous, at times even contradictory. It always has at its core the proclamation of the gospel under the vision of salvation by grace through faith. Among the many issues that are being dealt with some of the ones that stand out are: the Jubilee for the year 2000; youth and solidarity in cultural diversity; liturgy and art in an urban context; and education. The cultural tensions stemming from the ethnic (German) profile of the church needs to be studied in depth.

We have experienced *koinonia* between white middle-class and poor, black working-class children. The problem is the adult world. Let me conclude with the words of one of these children: church is a bunch of children who know that they are loved by God and hear God's word. But the adult church does not always give the children attention and space.



Seeking a Lutheran Identity

Blanca Irma Rodriguez

Introduction

In the early part of the last century El Salvador entered into active commercial and industrial development. Two parallel forces emerged: the coffee oligarchy and the military dictatorship. Together they undertook a project of expansion which encouraged activity primarily in the textile industry. The coffee barons began to modernize due to the expansion of the Common Central American Market (Mecomon). In 1969 a conflict exploded between El Salvador and Honduras, now known as the Hundred Hour War. This war began as Honduran unrest peaked due to the massive influx of Salvadoran products. In addition, at the time more than 300,000 Salvadorans migrants in Honduras were competing with local workers on an unstable job market.

In order to neutralize the contradictions generated by the oligarchic system, the Salvadoran government launched a program of agrarian reform in 1969 that sharpened the conflicts between conservatives and reformers.

The history of El Salvador is marked by pain and suffering beginning with the arrival of the Conquistadors followed by the colonizers and, finally, the bourgeoisie. During the 1970s and the 1980s, the suffering of the people reached serious levels due to the impunity and crimes committed by the military dictatorship.

The Rise of the Lutheran Church of El Salvador

In 1832, during General Francisco Morazan's rule, religious freedom was decreed. Since then Protestantism has been present in Central America.

Following many attempts to begin missionary work in El Salvador, Samuel Purdie and his family arrived in 1896, sponsored by the Central American Missionary Society. Fifty-six years later came the Lutheran mission to the city of Pasaquina. In 1972 the missionary Arturo Gerardo Kempff opened a mission in the city of San Salvador. Later pastor Medardo Gomez took charge of this mission after finishing his theological training in the Lutheran seminary "Ausburgo" in Mexico City.

San Salvador: La Resurrección (1972)

The testimony of Juanita Abrego, one of the mission's surviving founding members, tells us about Kempff's arrival in San Salvador and his desire to establish a Lutheran presence in the nation's capital. He started a church and was rather successful until he had to leave the country and was never heard of again. The space he left was then occupied by a group of women who, as members of the church, decided to send a letter to the Missouri Synod soliciting a pastor to continue the ministry. The Missouri Synod answered by sending pastor Medardo Gomez—who worked in the church of Zacapa, Guatemala—to fill in the position left by Kempff.

A new era began for the Lutheran church in El Salvador. In September 1999 the new parish "La Resurrección" was inaugurated. The name was chosen in order to symbolize the desire to "bring back to life" the evangelistic work that had seemed dead. With the support of the five women and their families the work started to expand to the surroundings areas of San Salvador.

Recovering Our History: First Actions

In 1977 the ultra right "Party of National Conciliation" was declared winner over the liberal party which opposed the present government. Proven electoral fraud shattered people's expectations of achieving changes by democratic means. This led to the search for new ways of expression and the organization of popular movements. From then on the oligarchy and military sought to repress these movements and began to label Christian communities subversive and Communist.

In the face of these events, the bishop of San Salvador, Monsignor Romero, changed his mind and the church started to assume more of an active role within the community. This challenged the Roman Catholic Church to call on Baptist, Episcopalian, and Lutheran churches for support. This is how the first ecumenical steps were taken in El Salvador.

Since its beginnings, the Lutheran Church in El Salvador has identified with those who suffer and who live in need.

Confronting Challenges

I will now refer to three problems that have become great challenges in our church, namely: the ecology, armed violence, and social issues.

The ecological problem

The ecological situation in Central America is truly alarming and must be faced with the same seriousness with which we face the economy, health

issues, and social security. Desertification and the lack of potable water are the results of a deficient preservation policy. The water level in El Salvador drops by one meter every year, according to some studies, and this annual drop is increasing. Some estimates indicate that by the year 2030 the Salvadoran soil will become a desert.

It is said that El Salvador as well as the rest of Central America faces one of the worst disequilibriums between humanity and nature. We have created and strengthened an imbalance of death over life.

The problem of armed violence

After the war and the ensuing peace-process and reconstruction, one would think that Salvadoran society lived in tranquility. Quite the opposite is true. It is said that today Salvadoran society is more heavily armed than ever.

Why? In its attempt to collect all weapons owned by civilians, the Salvadoran government allowed citizens to register these same weapons in their own name. This encouraged citizens to acquire a weapon and then register it. With these regulations in place, an illegal market for weapons soon came into being with the result that in the streets of cities and towns people were carrying weapons, all of which were legally registered.

Social problems

Unemployment, labor exploitation, unhealthy conditions, poor education and housing, the high cost of living and public services are some of the issues that require an answer from Salvadoran society. These conditions are fertile ground for crime and delinquency at every level. We have a culture of violence; the challenge is to transform it into a culture of peace.

The Attitude of the Church in Face of These Problems

These problems also affect the church. For many years the Lutheran church has been engaged in community development through programs of communal assistance. Through *Socorro Luterano* (Lutheran Help) the church has carried out part of the diaconical work. Assistance is also forged through other programs such as education, youth, communications, women, and healthcare. The challenge here is how to establish continuity within these projects when we lack the necessary funds to do so.

Challenges for the 21st Century

After the war, the church has attempted to maintain the "prophetic" rhythm of work that it developed over the years. The church believes this is neces-

sary to proceed in seeking God's kingdom. In view of this the church faces the following challenges.

Self-sustainability

One of the greatest problems is the economic crisis. Many attempts have been made to create the conditions necessary for gradual economic expansion, but every one of them has been unsuccessful. Attempts have been made to develop specific economic goals of self-management, but these too have failed. Our membership has encouraged the practice of neighborly love, by means of generous offerings to the diaconical work—yet these offerings barely cover the needs for temple maintenance.

To this we should add the challenge of stabilizing self-supporting educational projects (such as schools and the university) and community clinics.

Spirituality

There is a palpable "disenchantment" within the membership of our communities. During the war the Lutheran church was full, now the temples have many empty seats. Why? Is the church's message not fulfilling the spiritual needs of the people? Or do people see the church only as a refuge in periods of anguish? Could it be that the Lutheran church is a church for times of war rather than peace? Whatever the answer, we are faced with a mighty challenge: to learn to be a church in times of peace.

Marked by war psychosis

The Salvadoran population is marked by war psychosis and suffering. Incredibly, in the 20th century El Salvador participated in seven wars (July 1906, March 1907, June 1907, January 1932, December 1944, July 1969, the 1980s). These wars are part of the history of the Salvadoran people, which the church meets in its mission. The church must create spaces for pastoral counseling. The problem is, however, that pastors have also been affected by the same war experience; they need help too.

An Alternative Pastoral Model

In recent years the Salvadoran Lutheran Synod has experienced some problems with its pastors. This was partially due to the accelerated growth of participation in the 1980s which caught the church off guard. Pastors have responded positively to this growth: they are usually leaders in their original communities: they know the challenges of their people and they are not strangers.

However, these pastors lack sufficient biblical theological training to fulfill their responsibilities. In this regard, some improvements are being made through the joint training program with the Lutheran university of El Salvador.

We are in search of a pastoral model which promotes a sense of Lutheran identity among our membership. There is quite some confusion among the people on this issue. On the one hand, people believe that we are Catholics (since the Reformation proposed reforms of the Catholic church) while, on the other, it is said that we are a Protestant church because we do not recognize the authority and infallibility of the Pope. But how can we be Catholics and Protestants at the same time?

Achievements

For many years we maintained assistance programs for the population affected by the war which would not have been possible without the support of partner churches from overseas, particularly from Germany. A direct link was established, and delegates from these countries traveled and visited our communities exchanging experiences, concerns, and problem solving ideas.

Limitations

The relationships with these churches, however, are mostly carried on at the institutional level, and demonstrate the role of material assistance. In most cases the exchange is between hierarchies, for which it becomes necessary, therefore, to expand the relations at every level—especially at the grassroots.

Some of the German churches have done research in our communities, but we have never received any feedback from these projects, which could greatly help us to grow further.

I will finish by saying that there is a problem of understanding between both cultures, considering that the partner from the developed world is rich in resources and does not struggle for survival as does its partner. The Salvadoran Lutheran Synod, a church from the developing world, has attracted people living in mostly rural areas, its members are illiterate, and have a pitiful income well below the minimum salary established by law. This leads us to believe that we cannot speak of communion in the same terms: the Salvadoran Lutheran Synod is marked by its struggle for survival both at an individual level (each member fighting for their daily bread) as well as at the institutional level (attempting to survive in a hostile environment marked by the neo-liberal/capitalist/consumerist system and by the spiritualizing Pentecostal movement).

Yet we still can speak about how our partner churches help each other and of how the experience of one church is useful to the other. In face of this diversity we may ask: what is it that unites us? The answer may be found in Romans 8:9: "But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him." Therefore we participate in salvation if we experience Christ through his Spirit.

Reflections on a Latin American Ecclesiology

Pedro Puentes

Possible Approaches

Exclusiveness—Inclusiveness

The organization of the church is focused on space, and in that space, it deals with its micro-environment (church community), the intermediate environment (immediate or surrounding circumstances) and the macro-environment (society as a whole). The basic question is where and how the church's relationship to its environment is formed.

In this three-fold relational context the church's social stance can be discerned. It is not a pure manifestation and therefore comes with contradictions: one exclusive, the other inclusive, the latter being regarded as closer to the gospel. Both concepts must be addressed in a relational mode—in other words, beyond a mere statement of their existence.

One interesting aspect that seems to emerge is the ambivalence regarding inclusive living. For instance, the church in Guyana, can to some extent be seen as ethnically inclusive in the micro-environment, but has difficulties dealing with that same issue in the macro-environment. That tells us that inclusiveness in one environment is no guarantee it will be found in others. Does that mean their inclusiveness should be denied because it has not arisen in other environments? Yet it would seem that communities with exclusive forms of behavior establish their relationship with the intermediate and macro-environments through projects mostly designed to provide assistance.

The basic assumption, it would seem, in what could be called inclusive-relational ecclesiology, lies in organizing around an ethic of being in the midst of otherness. In other words, being "in the midst of" and "opposite" others, which is more than a mere statement that others exist. This assumption draws attention to the familiar and ordinary gaze directed to others. That gaze becomes transparent, in the sense that others are made invisible. What I am getting at is that within the environment, the individual and the community exist with an ethical option: exclude/include; ignore/recognize; get involved/avoid contact. Gerhard Ebeling already noticed this when he said:

It is true that if there is someone in front of us we may shift our gaze away but not simply ignore him. In other words, this "ignore" would be only slightly different from "look through." In the presence of another

person, there is a demand he makes on me in some way and me on him. Both things are valid: he is in my presence and I am in his.¹

What seems to be emerging is that community as communion can only be read from an inclusive-relational social stance in otherness. The otherness is based on the value, dignity, and respect inherent in each human being.

Nonetheless, as has been rightly pointed out, can the church maintain total inclusiveness? Can a torturer receive the Eucharist? To what extent does unrestricted inclusiveness cancel grace and works of faith?

This leads to the need to maintain in all circumstances the inclusive-relationship in otherness within the parameters of the gospel, understood as the tension between law and gospel. And in the micro-environment, that relationship is delineated and mobilized by the tension of faith and the works of faith. In other words, there is an exclusiveness at the level of a distinctive possession which gives the church its existence. In this regard, the gospel would be at once exclusive and inclusive, plus the community with a purely inclusive vocation.

One could say that the movement of theology here started from an ethical anthropology. It is not so much a matter of being justified through faith but that justification means being/doing for the individual and the community. If this good theology drives how we meet otherness, why are there manifestations of exclusiveness?

Diaconia—Liturgy

Underlying these organizational concepts is the question, What is it that brings this church together and at the same time forms its dynamics? There seem to be two images that can be offered. The first is a community centered on being. Such being is expressed in corporeality, being a body. The multiplicity of ministries gives power to the perception of body. This is appreciated, valued and given greater resonance by the liturgy of the Eucharist, as that which feeds being as body-being. The second image is that of a community centered on doing. Being is expressed in the move-and-do linkage. Value and weight are again offered in the liturgy of the Word as feeding and giving life to being-doing.

Each image suggests the following processions:

First image	Second image
EUCHARIST	DIACONIA
DIACONIA	EUCHARIST
EUCHARIST	DIACONIA

¹ Gerhard Ebeling, *Luther. Einführung in sein Denken* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1964) author's own translation.

Despite the fact that these same elements are present, their nature is, if not conflicting, then certainly different. The nucleus of the community seems to be either introverted or extroverted.

The basic assumption of each image is not what the community-body must give priority to: whether liturgy or *diaconia*. The existence of the church is presupposed before its mission. This takes us back to an old but no less important discussion about "being" versus "existing." It is it being which produces doing or is it doing that produces being? In biblical terms where do we put God when we say that God calls us and sends us?

We are so used to seeing church buildings and communities that we forget they started somewhere. That's why it is hard to find God outside the church. But where was God during all this? The first disciples were called to establish a relationship which was different in quality and quantity (they were what we would describe as envoys). In other words, called and sent are, it is suggested, but two aspects of a single reality.

It is no accident that this *diaconia* image, which refers not only to the life of faith, includes the expression "voice of prophecy." It seems to be understood as the action of the Spirit, in its discernment, sending and supporting, denoting thus a dynamic spirituality and one which is participatory in the needs of the environment.

One interesting aspect is that throughout the discussions at the Latin American regional meeting the sacrament of baptism was notable for its absence. What would be your understanding of each of the ecclesiastical images? Perhaps one person would see it as embodying the community of faith. Another maybe as embodying a new quality and quantity aspect in their relationships.

Despite the foregoing, the Savior has given us food for thought about this image of *diaconia*. Here the voice of prophecy and the martyr of the church would seem to have lost their meaning.

Hazarding a Few Ideas

One thing is clear: we will not be able to make headway if we do not become reconciled to our past. As far as identity is concerned, it is necessary to move from an identity that is inherited to one that we have responsibly embraced. That does not mean we have to bring the past into the present but have to work on it in the exchange with the environments. We have to face down the traumas, tackle and work through them. On both points our brothers and sisters from other shores have a great deal to offer since they have earned academic degrees for their research into our history, problems, and tragedies. Here, I wish to suggest a project, in the words of Victor Jara ("What is of the people for the people"): recovering memory. Let us translate what has been

written, let us be told what they have seen and who knows whether our bodies may understand the why and wherefore of their pains and your hearts may beat in time with ours.

The face of the images of Latin American Lutheran churches presented, lack luster, eschatological luster. Not the immanent or other-worldly eschatology of the literalists or fundamentalists, but an eschatology which offers a critical analysis of and provides inspiration for the now, the present. This is an eschatology which is willing to hope against all hope, which consecrates the martyrs and gives strength to the fallen, which does not place its trust in success or winning the glittering prizes but on the promise and the faithfulness of God who made it.

What we are gaining a glimmer of is that a *diaconia*-church image is more likely to offer the voice of prophecy and a relevant, meaningful pastoral service permeated with increasing relational inclusiveness. At the same time, this dynamism would make it possible to work on its identity with more components. The difficulties of this model in traditional communities are almost obvious, but this does not mean that we are faced with an impossibility—merely a challenge.

Traits and Tensions in Ecclesiology

Else Marie Wiberg Pedersen

Bridging the Unbridgeable

It is no easy task to build a bridge between the Latin American self-understanding of ecclesiology and its sociological and theological implications. The Latin American Lutheran churches are as multifaceted and diverse as the societies in which they are rooted. As a European I am aware that my task is not to judge simplistically the concepts and movements of the churches on this huge continent, where the gaps between different denominations (ecclesial difference), ethnic groups (cultural difference) and social classes (socio-economic difference) often seem unbridgeable. It is far from my intention to approach this question as a colonialist from the European continent, imposing my theology on Latin America. Rather, I come as a co-Lutheran trying to see the Latin American churches within their specific context. One hopes a fruitful dialogue can arise on that ground and point to the future of the Lutheran churches worldwide, strengthening their self-understanding as churches in and of the world.

Having stated that, it is vital that one not be unnerved to the extent that one dare not be critical and restrict oneself to being apologetic or, at worst, to saying nothing. It has been the task of a group of international theologians to focus critically on the different aspects and consequences of the self-understanding in all Lutheran member churches, our own churches included. In that undertaking there has been a strong awareness that any church is to be found in the tension between reality and ideal, and that this tension actually belongs to its being church in the world,¹ as it will also influence the way it acts out its ethics.

In the following, I shall limit myself, first, to stressing a few common traits of the Lutheran churches and the societies in which they exist, and, second, to pointing to some of the tensions that arise out of these same common traits. In so doing, I cannot give anything more than a general sketch, thereby perhaps leaving out some important nuances, based on what we heard at the Latin American regional meeting in São Leopoldo, Brazil. However, although

¹ Cf. Wolfgang Huber: "...kennzeichnend für sie [die Kirche] ist zugleich die Differenz, der Abstand zu der ursprünglichen Gestalt, in der diese Verheissung in die Welt trat: zur Gestalt Jesu selbst," in *Kirche* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1979), p. 62.

I will be looking mainly through the scope of the Brazilian church, which is home to 86.2 percent of Lutherans in South America, the churches of Argentina, Chile, El Salvador, Venezuela and Guyana deliver important features to the sketch.

Common Traits

The Latin American context: society

Latin America is shaped by its history of 300 years of colonialism under Spanish or Portuguese governance. It is a harsh history resulting in a multi-ethnic and multicultural population, a blend of indigenous, Southern European colonists, African slaves, and finally of Northern European immigrants; and in extremely fragile and unstable states. Many of them have been subjugated to military dictatorships—some such as Argentina, Brazil, and Bolivia even several times during the 20th century, fed by the enormous socio-economic gap between the rich (landowners, primarily white) and the poor (homeless, land-less or small farmers, primarily black),² only becoming increasingly impoverished. The drastic and rapid urbanization, resulting in uprooting of families, mushrooming of *favelas* [slums], (6-700 in Rio alone) and a ruinous rate of crime and violence, adds even more sadly to the enormous social problems.

Although they are democracies by now (Argentina and Chile in 1989, El Salvador in 1983–1992),³ these fragile states have inherited the severe social and economic problems of the past. Also, in spite of their richness of resources, they are dependent on international financial support. In this respect, an unfortunate *liaison* of global and continental market interests has fatal effects. The well-known spiral of loans and debts, and the environmental problems (exploitation of the rain forest and the dumping of trash, for instance), are evidence of that.

To complete the picture, the serious ethical injustice that the Latin American people have recently experienced should not be forgotten. I'm referring to the amnesty given to the violators (military as well as paramilitary) of innocent people's rights and lives. Without a doubt, the problem of impunity and the events providing its background is a wound so deep that it is practically untouchable.

² According to a 1999 UN Report, Brazil came in second among the most unjust countries in the world, in that 10 percent of the population own 50 percent of the land whereas 50 percent of the poorest own only 10 percent—the color of the skin explicitly accompanying the step on the social ladder.

³ The exact dating is somewhat obscure due to the civil war, and the situation in El Salvador is still characterized by instability.

This is the immediate context of the churches: deeply fractured societies, the people of which, underneath their admirable strength and pride, are deeply wounded.⁴ However, a new future is dawning, as the Latin American countries are in transition, slowly developing from more "late feudal" to more fully democratic societies.

The church

It is against this background that we must view the churches in Latin America. As the societies with their inherited, even growing, social, cultural, and economic problems, are in transition, so are the churches. This transition includes finding a new role in the new democracies. (For example, the Salvadoran church expressed the need for learning to be a church in peace, and not only in crisis.)⁵ The transition also means connecting this new role with their European or American heritage.

Related to the societal context of the Lutheran churches are two difficulties that to a certain extent dominate the scope of their ecclesiological self-understanding. First, as minority churches in Christian countries traditionally dominated by the Roman Catholic faith, they have had a marginal role as sectarian. In spite of an explosive Protestant growth, mainly involving Pentecostalism, Lutheran church membership seems to be in a decline somewhat. Second, Roman Catholicism, although it lost touch with the masses (even through the innovative paradigms of liberation theology of the 1970s), has been the ruling faith for so many centuries that it has diffused into a Latin American Catholic culture. Thus Lutherans find themselves almost sandwiched between two sides, with neither of which they want to be identified.

The process of transition and transformation is foremost an identification process of finding a new identity as Lutheran churches in the specific Latin American context. In this late post-colonial situation, they find themselves faced with the difficulty of identifying, not with their immigrant past, but with the people of the present society. While distancing themselves from their former isolationist stance as smaller units of ethnic groups and corresponding religious communities (German, Scandinavian or American churches re-planted in Latin America) they now have come to see themselves as part of

⁴ Guyana and the Lutheran church of Guyana, the history and geography of which differ considerably from the Latin American countries, fall outside of this picture. Nevertheless Guyana shares with the other countries represented here the problems of ethnicity (Indians versus Africans) and of environment.

⁵ According to an interview with Wolfgang Huber and John de Gruchy, given in Denmark April 1999, this also goes for both the Protestant churches in former Eastern Germany and South Africa. In Germany, people in spite of the church's opposition to the Communist regime object to being "organized" in any system while stressing their newly gained freedom. In South Africa, people due to their being abandoned by the church and Christianity as such during apartheid now expressly declare themselves secular.

the people in their society on the whole. The aim is to obtain a contextual identity as local churches—Brazilian, Argentine, Chilean, Salvadoran, or Venezuelan—in the Latin American region. Ethically, it is to step out of an almost sectarian isolation and enact solidarity with the disadvantaged fellow-citizens—the others (to take the mantra-like term from liberation theology): the indigenous, the blacks, the poor, the disabled, or the homeless.

In short, like Asian and African churches, the Latin American churches are striving towards autonomy, seeking to formulate an autonomous theological paradigm that can manifest their existence as communities, an incarnated *koinonia*, in their specific societies. To accomplish that, the churches are searching for the balance of independence and dependence from the West, which colonized, immigrated, and not only did mission but indeed formulated and exported its theology to Latin America. Hence there is an urgent need for, metaphorically speaking, the umbilical chord to be cut so that the churches can grow towards self-sustainability, becoming financially as well as theologically independent institutions. The church of Guyana has most successfully demonstrated that they are already most capable of this.

Tensions in the Church

The ideal

In the identification process one must always ask if the identification is taking place from the margins or from the center. In other words, does one identify oneself in opposition to the others, or from one's own focus, thus stressing what one is (*via positiva*) rather than what one is not (*via negativa*)? The churches in Latin America are very conscious of identifying themselves from the very center of being Lutheran. They are posing such questions as: What does it mean to be Lutheran? Why are we Lutherans here in Latin America? Is there any reason for our existence within our special context? Questions crucial for understanding oneself and being able to meet others, those at the margins, in an integrative way.

In the search for a new identity a growing awareness of the church's prophetic role within society is noticeable. In some places it was already fully developed. An increasing number of churches is concerned with doing social work among the marginalized—the weak and disabled, the poor and disadvantaged—and are, sometimes against all odds, doing a tremendous job. In relation to the prophetic role of the church, two statements cropped up several times and quite programmatically so: *diaconia* should be linked to *koinonia*, and the church should meet the needs of the people.

This awareness shows that in being prophetic the church simultaneously strives towards filling the role of servant. From what was presented at the

Latin American regional consultation it seems to me that the prophetic collapsed into the servant. Ideologically, the churches have acknowledged that the church as a community is a church sent into the world, situated in a society. Consequently, the peoples among whom the church exists, not of whom it consists, is viewed as its primary reason for existing. The ecclesiological self-understanding as that of a church for the people is strongly stressed and is initiated in a serious as well as solid diaconal work in various social fields (the poor, small farmers, street children, disabled, AIDS-infected, drug addicts, and so on). In accordance, the ideal church is defined as a church in which each and everyone is dignified as a responsible human being, a church of solidarity, inclusion, integration, and liberation in a missionary and ecumenical sense. This very ideal is being programmatically based on the Reformation doctrine "justification by grace through faith" (*Confessio Augustana* IV), so much so that the *dictum* of the Reformers—"the article by which the church will stand or fall"—has also become center and focus of the Latin American churches.

Finally, to be a church for the people the church should not freeze institutionally but remain dynamic. In that undertaking, the need for a restructuring of the church including a variety of church models adequately to respond to the social and cultural diversity is firmly emphasized.

The reality

As in any church in and of this world, there is an unavoidable gap between theory and practice. While the strong sociological awareness of the presence of Christ in the midst of despair is an indisputable strength of the Latin American churches, it is not yet well bridged in terms of theology and ecclesiology. There seems to be either a good theology lacking ecclesiological explications and social implications, or a good social practice lacking theological explications and ecclesiological implications. On the whole, it is a split and divided church, not only by generation or social class, but also doctrinally, the division of Lutherans into two different churches in Chile being a concrete and tragic example. In the following, I shall point to some of the major tensions between theory and practice.

First, the evident tension between *diaconia* and *koinonia*, with which the churches themselves are preoccupied. In their endeavors to formulate a new identity, the Lutheran churches, while being fully aware of their diaconal role expressed in their concern for the needs of the people, still have a tendency to see the others as primarily different from themselves, thus, in practice, identifying themselves from the margins. The very fact that the diaconal work of the church is primarily outwardly directed, whereas the congregational practice is solely inwardly directed (a phenomenon also reflected in the church of Guyana), is a reflection of this. As long as the poor and needy are not

generally invited into and welcomed in the churches to co-celebrate worship, there is a deficit in seriously integrating these others as others, whether in the missionary or the sacramental activity carried out by the church. Even if the diaconal work calls for respect, there seems to be a need to move beyond the split between communal worship and social approach and to arrive at an ecclesiological elaboration on how to include the people, the poor and needy, in the church understood to exist for them.

Inasmuch as the churches are preoccupied with living out their self-understanding as the servant who meets the needs of the people (see Mk 10:35-45), the real challenge for them appears to lie precisely here: in the integration of the poor and weak by truly identifying with them. Indeed, as the parable of the rich man (Mk 10: 21-25) illustratively tells us, it is an impossible task for the rich to identify with the poor and truly to understand what poverty means. To the rich, poverty is not an experience, but merely a question of not having, be it money or property, while liberation of the poor accordingly means meeting the lack of having. To the poor, however, poverty is not simply a question of not having. Far more, to be poor also means to sell what they are—poverty is a question of not being someone who counts. Consequently, to the poor uprooting poverty means not only being liberated from not having but also being liberated to being someone, a human being with a dignity of one's own within the human community. Thus to the poor it is not a matter of being identified as poor, but to transcend poverty. To establish a community of individual human beings in order that it can be a full *koinonia*, also the poor must be given the freedom to serve in Christ (Gal 2:4 and 5:1.13). Luther expresses it thus in *The Freedom of a Christian* based on Rom 5:5: "each and everyone of us must become Christ for the other, so that we alternately are Christ and the same Christ is in all, i.e. that we are truly (*vere*) Christian."⁶ If the poor are simply being served, they will remain objects without becoming themselves subjects of the servant role.

Secondly, I should like to point to a tension between *mission* and *identification/integration*, in that there is a tendency to do mission without really identifying with or integrating those amongst whom mission is done. The pre-conditions for any missionary activity is the building up of awareness and belonging in the sense that every person exists as part of a community with her or his own special history, myths, language, and cultural traits. In this process, it is essential to meet the other person as exactly another human being created by God (as *imago Dei*) belonging to the same human community, thus welcoming creation and being open to God the Creator of all.⁷ There

⁶ Luther, *Tractatus de libertate christiana*, WA 7, p. 66.

⁷ As the Danish theologian N.F.S. Grundtvig (1783-1872) paradigmatically expressed it: "First a human being, then a Christian." This very notion made him emphasize the importance of always avoiding the alienation of others. Through mission, people should not be alienated from their own community, their historical roots, or their national and cultural belonging. On the

is a growing awareness of this and fine examples of people being integrated in congregations, but at the same time there is much opposition to such integrating work. To overcome that opposition, an elaborated understanding of the Nicene Creed's first article and of creation theology as such might promote formulating an encompassing anthropology that could support the social work enacted.

Third, there is a tension between the doctrine of justification on the one hand and the theological explications as well as the ecclesiological implications on the other. The doctrine of justification is considered the very foundation of the church (the church is based on it; it is the provoking message of the church or the key of its ethics) that with its universally liberating potential ought to secure its ecumenicity. Nevertheless, the question remains how this doctrine is translated not only into ethical actions but also into a comprehensible theology and ecclesiology that transcends the stage of being abstract dogmatic rhetoric.

Because this doctrine looms large in the Latin American context and not least because it is vital to Lutheranism as such, I shall take the opportunity of raising a series of questions related to it.⁸ How does one translate the doctrine into understandable words? What are in this connection justification, grace, and faith? Whose justification, whose grace, and whose faith are we talking about? Why is the last element of the doctrine "for Christ's sake" (*propter Christum*)—the very element which states that the justification of the sinner is not our, but indeed a *iustitia aliena* implying that Christ in his real presence is our very justification—left out in all contributions?

How do justification and sanctification relate? Are they two theological moments in the cross, or are they rather two intertwined aspects of the Christian's relation to God: justification being the grace of God as our relation (outer) *coram Deo*, sanctification being the gifts of grace working in us (inner) in our daily (*quotidie*) struggle against sin? How does the doctrine of justification connect with a comprehensible ecclesiology, including the sacraments (what part does baptism, barely mentioned, actually play in the Latin American churches?)? How do we avoid reducing the doctrine of justification by identi-

contrary, their identity and potentials within their own setting and way of life through education, what he called "education for life" with its double implication of being both a lifelong training and a training to live life as a responsible citizen, should be awakened. For a further explication, see the recent publication Holger Bernt Hansen, "Education for Life or for Livelihood? Grundtvig and the Third World Revisited," in A.M. Allchin, S.J. Bradley, N. Hjelm, J.H. Schjørring (eds.), *Grundtvig in International Perspective. Studies in the Creativity of Inspiration* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2000) pp. 193-207.

⁸ See the booklet published by Department for Theology and Studies: Viggo Mortensen (ed.), *Justification and Justice* (Geneva: LWF, 1992). For a fine description of the dilemma of modernity faced with the problem of (re-) uniting what has been separated into a solely theological issue (justification) and a solely sociopolitical issue (justice), see especially Vitor Westhelle, "The Third Bank of the River. Thoughts on justification and justice," pp. 29-36. Cf. The concerns mentioned in the essay by Gottfried Brakemeier, "A vision for the 21st century."

fying it totally with ecclesiology, hence amalgamating ecclesiology and soteriology? In some instances, there is a tendency towards such identification, which we so often have seen lead to the unfortunate consequence of reducing the kingdom of God to our worldly church. Justification and ecclesiology, however, should be clearly distinguished for more than one reason. First, justification is a soteriological rather than an ecclesiological concept. Second, the *simul iustus et peccator* principle is a polemically formulated theological expression articulating the believer's existential situation rather than a hermeneutical key for identifying the true (and eschatological) church community within the actually existing church.

The relation justification/ecclesiology needs clarification, as does the relation justification/society: How is justification linked to justice and preached in a society that is so extremely unjust? Furthermore, how do we avoid absolutizing or institutionalizing only one set of ethical standards? Finally, considering the strong emphasis on justification, what part do the central aspects of Christianity, forgiveness and reconciliation—not in the least in relation to the ethical injustices done to the people—play?⁹ All these questions are not only extremely complicated, they are vital, if an inclusive and holistic church is ever to be realized in a highly broken and fragmented world, the resources of which could not be distributed more unjustly. As this is not a problem between the so-called one-third/two-thirds worlds alone, but also, and indeed, within the so-called third world itself, we should all be pointing at ourselves, when dealing with it.

Fourth, I find it important to point to a tension between christology on the one hand and creation theology and pneumatology on the other. The presentations focused so strongly on the theology of the cross, that there was a tendency to stay at the point of crucifixion, thus neglecting that the event of crucifixion is pointing both backward to creation and forward to resurrection and Pentecost. Expressed in the dialectics of immanence and transcendence, and of incarnation and resurrection, the Christian God is very much a God of life and hope. Notwithstanding the strength of the theology of the cross, a one-sided focus seems also to have its deficit, which becomes evident when we face the challenge of Pentecostalism. The Lutheran churches have so far been quite hostile to the Pentecostal movements, as has the Catholic church. Hence the ecumenical work practiced by the churches has until now principally been a cooperation with Catholics. Not in the least inspired by Catholic

⁹ Surprisingly, there was no reference from any of the countries represented to what may be referred to as being in the category of "Never Again!" (Nunca más; Nunca mais) books covering a number of significant publications on the nature and scale of military repression in Latin America since 1970. Some of these were results of governmental commissions; others were results of such non-governmental bodies as human rights groups, ecumenical groups, or churches who wanted to reveal the frightening truth as a first step in achieving justice. See further Charles Harper (ed.), *Impunity. An Ethical Perspective. Six Case Studies from Latin America* (Geneva:WCC Publications, 1996), pp. 136-138.

liberation theology,¹⁰ Lutherans and Catholics have been partners in the social work enacted towards non-Lutherans as its main target group.

In view of the decrease in membership of the Lutheran communities and the explosive growth of Pentecostal communities, it might be time again to ask why this is so. Perhaps the time has come to stop perceiving the Pentecostal movements as the result of either a U.S. right-wing conspiracy (primarily the view of the Roman Catholic Church) or as a socioeconomic phenomenon (primarily the view of the Lutheran churches). Instead of simply assuming that the poor are misled by false prophets of fortune, perhaps we should begin trusting the poor's ability to "turn an imported religion to their own purposes." This is the notion of David Stoll,¹¹ who further points to the complexity of the Pentecostal growth. In agreement with Stoll, Guillermo Cook¹² suggests that one might simply understand Pentecostalism as a counter-cultural, anti-establishment group, holding the low christology of the religious roots of Christianity as opposed to the extremely high christology of the Lutheran churches. Quite interesting for a Lutheran church having been labeled sectarian, Cook continues by questioning the labeling of Pentecostalism as a "sect": for what is a "sect" and "does it always behave sectarian?" Cook's conclusion, which ought to catch our attention, is that many Pentecostals have actually developed into ecumenical communities.

On the whole, I believe that the Lutheran churches must now seriously look for in-depth answers as to why Pentecostalism has such an appeal. Endeavors to learn from the strong spirituality of Pentecostal churches and continue the diaconal tasks of the church might together result in a Lutheran ecclesiology based on a clearly trinitarian theology. This would mean a completion of the strong stress on the creed's second article, so easily resulting in a vertically oriented theology, with a stress on the creed's first and third articles and a more horizontal orientation. Thus, the churches would do well to remember that the Spirit of God is also the very performer of creation, not only from Pentecost (Acts 2), but from the morning of creation (Gen 1:2); and that the very doctrine of justification by faith (Rom 3:20ff) is linked not only to peace and grace but indeed also to the hope and love granted us by the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5).¹³ Christian theology is a trinitarian theology, and it is important

¹⁰ Although it was hardly mentioned, the theological paradigm of liberation theology (Gustavo Gutierrez) and the ecclesiological paradigm of the base communities (Leonardo Boff) have quite obviously inspired the Lutheran understanding of the prophetic and servant church.

¹¹ David Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant? The Politics of Evangelical Growth* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) xvi, 33-35.

¹² Guillermo Cook, *New Face of the Church in Latin America. Between Tradition and Change*, American Society of Missiology Series No. 18 (New York: Orbis Books, 1994), xi-xii.

¹³ Cf. Luther, *Prologue to the Romans* (WA 7,11), where he stresses the reciprocity of faith and the Holy Spirit, in that faith brings about the Holy Spirit while renewing us daily as also the Holy Spirit works in us through faith so that we put our trust in God's grace. Cf. also Mt. 12:30-32; Rom. 8; I Cor. 12; I Pet. 4: 11.

that no article of the creed stands alone, unbalanced by the other two. As society determines the way in which the church acts, theology determines our ecclesiology—in other words, how we speak of God determines how we understand the church.¹⁴ Thus in my view, an elaboration of the *perichoretic* understanding of the Trinity as a horizontally oriented theology might promote the notion of an inclusive, *perichoretic* community. In that respect, there seems to be a need thoroughly to rethink and develop a Lutheran understanding of how and toward what ends the Holy Spirit works in the holy, catholic church which is the communion of saints.

In relation to the deficit of explications and implications of the creed's third article, let me make a small digression, essential to ecclesiology. One of the essays stated that "we do not see the church, we believe *in it*." This is actually counter to tradition's sound principle of discerning between, on the one hand, the belief *in the Holy Spirit* (*in* refers only to Holy Spirit) and, on the other, the belief *that* there is a holy and catholic church, the community of saints.¹⁵ The logical conclusion of the creed is, that we believe in God who is also the Holy Spirit, the very focus of the third article, therefore putting our trust in it.¹⁶ Based on this belief we believe that on earth, in history, there exists a church. We believe that God the Holy Spirit sanctifies sinners and from individual human beings creates a communion—a church that becomes one because it is made holy through God's sanctifying grace.¹⁷ I believe this distinction in belief to be vital, not in order to retain a dogmatic and sterile rhetoric, but in order to underline the relativity and dynamic of the church which the subtle distinction in the wording signifies, and of which also the Latin American churches are aware.

Finally, concluding from the way recent history of the past three to four decades was ignored on behalf of the early colonial and missionary history of the 16th to 19th centuries, there seems to be a tension between the history/reality and the eschatology/vision of the churches. Whereas there was an ex-

¹⁴ This is the notion running through Miroslav Volf's book: *After Our Likeness. The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998).

¹⁵ *The Nicene Creed* very clearly distinguishes between the two elements. But also in *Symbolum Romanum*, according to Rufinus from Aquileia's *Expositio symboli* from 404, there is a clear distinction, detectable from the grammar in that *in Spiritu Sancto* is in the ablative (credo in + ablative = rely on, hold true) while *sanctam Ecclesiam* is in the accusative (credo + accusative = believe in).

¹⁶ Cf. Per Lönning, *Kristen tro* (Christian Faith), (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1989), p. 203.

¹⁷ Luther in *On the Councils and the Church* states that we in the faith of our childhood confess: "Ich glaube eine heilige, christliche Kirche, Gemeinschaft der heiligen". This is the church that is "a holy people" exactly because the Holy Spirit gives people their faith in Christ, sanctifying them, so that they can begin the lifelong process towards becoming new creatures. But the church exists in this world in this life, while the kingdom of God will not appear until the end of the world. WA 50, pp. 624-28. Note that Luther does not use the preposition "an" ("glaube eine...; not "glaube an eine...") as to the church, meaning that he does not "believe in" the church, but believes it to exist (cf. note 13).

pressed call on the church to grasp for signs pointing to a better future, hence putting up a vision for the church, there was an explicit reluctance to deal with the recent past and, to some extent, also to the presence of the church. The question is, however, how to do that. Is it possible simply to move on and form a better, even promising, future without looking deeply into the past and presence of the church to face its reality? In other words, is it possible to formulate any *promissio/visio* of a real eschatological future without putting words to the historical past and presence, out of which this future shall rise?

Let me close by pointing to issues that were expected but either not raised or not elaborated:

- Liberation theology, having so much influenced Lutheranism, was only implicitly mentioned and with only one reference to Walter Altmann.
- The question of impunity and justice, playing such an essential role in the aftermath of the injustices of the military regimes, were only briefly touched upon, and only by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chile.
- The question of gender was not raised by the representatives from Latin America, and was only reluctantly touched upon during the discussion. Although Brazil got women pastors about three decades ago, this does not wholly explain the avoidance of the question of gender. It remains that the IELC, Chile, is still a male-centered church that does not allow women pastors. A latent hierarchy in the distribution of ministries still needs to be dealt with¹⁸ as does the fact that Latin American society on the whole is still very traditional in its view of women, not least due to the impact of the Catholic church on society.

¹⁸ Already on its synod 1994, the ECLCB expressed its concerns about the hierarchical structure of the church. It adopted a proposal for adapting a new strategy: "Ministries in Partnership" to be implemented in three tempi.



Prophetic Service and Pastoral Care

Joachim Track

The church's prophetic task consists on the one hand in frankly criticizing the unjust conditions we are confronted with. On the other, it means discovering the creative and new possibilities God has facilitated for us, in our concrete situation. That is the other aspect of the prophetic task.

Nonetheless, it is rather surprising that in the country where liberation theology originated, the larger political dimensions of this prophetic task were not addressed substantially. Ivoni Richter Reimer suggests making use of the cultural heritage and for the church to utilize political power at the local level. Obviously, in Latin America, just as in Europe following the collapse of the socialist block, the basis for social analysis seems to have been destroyed. In a world of ever-growing complexity there seems to be little room for developing utopias. We seem to be pervaded by a feeling of powerlessness. As important as the local level is we need a comprehensive and feasible concept for social action, comprising the national and even the international level. Would it not be possible in this field to collaborate with the progressive forces in other Brazilian churches, to be the voice of the voiceless and to talk with politicians about new ways and concepts? Initiating such a process worldwide would, to my mind, also be a task for the Lutheran World Federation.

There was strong emphasis on the Lord's Supper as the center of worship services which, to my understanding, seems to be one important dimension of pastoral care. Pastoral care also means addressing the individual in his or her unmistakable otherness and discovering his or her specific gifts. In baptism everyone is promised to be accepted by God, to be someone, to be a member of the Christian *communio* and to be able to work in this *communio* with his or her gifts. In today's anonymous society we expect to be taken seriously as the particular person we really are, with our strengths and weaknesses and, also, to be accompanied at every stage of our life. The idea of *communio* is understood only if it includes this dimension.

The church is to be the light and the salt of the world. Moreover, it should possess the wisdom of, while knowing human beings, loving them. It should work professionally while being naïve enough to believe that it is possible with the help of God to effect real changes. Then, our churches, in the midst of the world and not out of this world, will be growing churches, growing in quality and, perhaps, also in quantity.

Ethnic Identity and the Challenge of Multiculturalism

Israel Peter Mwakyolile

It seems that while the ethnic aspect of many churches in Latin America is strong this is especially true of those in southern Brazil. Until recently the churches were using German, and a visitor to a Sunday service would hardly see people of other ethnic groups such as indigenous Indians and black Africans. This does not shock one very much since the Lutheran churches in Brazil were originally meant for German immigrant farmers.

This picture points to some deficits since it shows how exclusive the church can be. It is an aspect that can contribute to the failure of the church becoming a real missionary church and, thus, impede its growth. If the church reflects upon itself and recognizes the deficits in its identity and calling and, subsequently, opens up there is always a chance of a hopeful future.

Apart from the problem of identity, there is another related problem of integration. People are socially not living in real *koinonia*. Some of the poor are identified as "people of the garbage," and even for these *koinonia* is not possible. (A white woman looks down on a black woman in the same disastrous condition!) The church is challenged to invent real ways of enabling mutual living and to have a neutral language for all its members despite differences in social status. We are all Christians and stand equal before God.

When one examines closely this question of identity, one sees that there is a tendency to regard first one's own identity and then the identity of the other, instead of taking both into account simultaneously. This leads to idolizing one's own identity over against the identity of others. The result of this is that one tends to love oneself more than one's neighbor. One makes a profit at the cost of the other, one fails to hear the silent or loud cries of other people who belong to the Christian church or beyond the boundaries of Christianity.

Latin America has a history that starts with the discovery of a "new world." There was an interaction of the discoverers and the indigenous. Added to these two groups were a large number of slaves from Africa. Thus Latin America became inhabited by a multicultural population. Despite this long history of multiculturalism, one still sees deep divides between the various groups. The majority of the white population, which is only a small percentage of the whole population, enjoys the best economic positions because they own the biggest part of the best farmland. The indigenous and the black Africans, the offspring of slaves, suffer from this economic injustice. So community is mainly built on economic and racial lines.

Multiculturalism is a blessing from God to his creation. It has to be reflected in the acceptance and recognition of the other as our thanksgiving to God. The church must face challenges such as:

1. *The problem of ethnocentrism*: The church of Christ surpasses all boundaries but its members tend to stay within them and avoid the challenge of multiculturalism.
2. *Bridging the gap between theory and practice*: Very often the church is good in giving abstract explanations of reality, but when it comes to practical aspects, it tends to be conservative—thus failing to turn theory into practice (e.g. in gender relations). Because the church is living in a changed reality, let this changed reality challenge the church to examine closely and critically the question of multiculturalism.
3. *Changes in society*: The church experiences new life-styles not prevalent years ago, such as homosexual life, or pastors divorcing and remarrying. The people who live in such life relationships are in the society and are members of the church. The question is: How does the church engage itself with these persons? Because things are always changing, the church has to have an open eye and ear to see and hear the needs of the people and counsel or help them, so that they do not experience isolation.

The church needs a solid understanding of creation to reflect this openness theologically. This implies a theology of life in all its richness and diversity.

North America

A North American Experience: It Ain't Nothin' but the Blues

Joachim Track

When arriving in a country for the very first time, each one of us already has their own particular relationship with that country. I am no exception. I had my own relationship with the United States of America before setting foot on the continent for the first time. It relates to my own personal history, even if it is one that is perhaps rather typical for a German growing up during World War II. During my childhood, the U.S. was above all the land of hope. The U.S. taught us that democracy can exist and is worth striving for. With the help of the U.S. (West) Germany returned to the community of nations. From the U.S. we learned that the church, also the Lutheran church, can survive and indeed be vibrant without a church tax being levied by the state. Here we were confronted with a different type of church: the church of the future? During my youth I had great expectations of the U.S. For me it was the land of modernity, a democratic country, capable of integrating different peoples (the famous "melting pot") innovative and powerful, willing to defend freedom and human rights worldwide.

But then came the disenchantment: The Vietnam War and the realization that "repressive tolerance" can be exercised even under a democratic system, as well as our first insight into the power of capitalism and the victims it produces. But what was the alternative? Democratic socialism?

When I come to the U.S. I continue to feel a mixture of apprehension and hope. The U.S. remains an innovative country in which so much of what determines our future begins. And this time was no exception. We frequently refer to the U.S. as a county of contradictions, but that epithet is too imprecise, too simplistic. We certainly experienced stark contrasts at our other consultations in Asia, in Africa and in Latin America, above all the contrast between rich and poor, privileged and underprivileged, contrasts that reach deeply into the Christian church. That there are strong contrasts is nothing new, but the fact that they manifest themselves so blatantly in the U.S. irritates me, a European. Is this the "beautiful, new world" we can all look forward to?

For a European, the vast expanse of the country is overpowering as is the magnitude and diversity of its landscape, lakes, mountains, coastline – a surfeit of nature. But then, there are the huge fields of the Midwest with their

monoculture, their industrialized and economized agriculture and agribusiness where, as we heard at the consultation, farmers have to struggle to survive. We find impressive, architecturally appealing city centers – Chicago, for example, is the cradle of much of modern architecture – next to derelict roads, houses, indeed whole districts, a devastation which I only know from the early days of the socialist countries. Inconceivable wealth goes hand in hand with abject poverty – poverty that in the tourist centers has been relegated to the outskirts. We come face to face with a multicultural and multi-religious society, one that believes that that which is different can coexist. But it is also a society where different cultures and groups are isolated and racism is only barely hidden beneath the thin veil of political correctness. The USA, a world power that claims the right to be a world leader but in whose news the rest of the world hardly figures. I find these opposites hard to bear: On the one hand the friendliness we encounter, on the other, the mercilessness with which the weak, those without hope, are dealt with. How can one stand this at the esthetic as well as at the ethical level?

In this country in transition, a country of contradictions, we find the Lutheran church a large church in terms of the Lutheran World Federation, a small church in its own country. It is one among many denominations molded by the history of European immigrants. How does it understand itself, which road will it take, what are its aims?

I was struck above all by the openness and honesty that pervade discussions in the church, the congregations, universities and among the church leadership. There was no beating about the bush nor fine words, but straight talk – this is what we have achieved, and this is where we've failed. Fundamental questions were addressed openly. Has the church despite all its engagement and attempts at integration remained a middle-class, white church? Is it an inviting or welcoming church or one that through its practices closes itself off? What influence do Protestant concepts such as freedom and justification have on the shape of the church? These are just some examples of the questions, and the way in which they were discussed was indeed liberating.

This is closely related to my second observation. During our other consultations there was a noticeable reticence to reveal all immediately: people approached one another carefully before disclosing their pastoral, theological and political opinions. Often the core group needed to probe further. How very different at the North American consultation where participants spoke up fearlessly. Controversial subjects were broached immediately, be it homosexuality or racism, the planned community with the Episcopalian church, or the political mission of the church. The core group was immediately invited to join in these discussions.

Third, there was the clear realization that the church is at a turning point and challenged by societal transformations, at the local as well as the global level. (James Wind) It became clear that the church is more than a mirror of

society; it is capable of resistance as a sign of the cross and the resurrection. The church is more ecumenical than American society and therefore aware that there can only be a local communion of faith if it understands itself as a part of the worldwide communion of Christianity and in solidarity with the world. It is very much a diaconal church – one which does not ignore misery or subscribe to the saying that we are all masters or mistresses over our own fortunes. In the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) we encountered two churches that are aware of their problems and difficulties, are engaged in their faith, in witness and service, are determined in their patience and hope to walk the walk of the faith, even if at times they suffer set-backs.

“It ain’t nothin’ but the blues” – in order to escape the confines of the catholic monastery that put us up we sometimes, in the late evening, visited nearby blues bars. I not only love this music but it has become a symbol for me of what America, and the church in America can be. The blues have been influenced by the most diverse experiences – the great suffering during the days of slavery, the white farmers, and much more. The blues find their strength in the integration of these diverse elements, the passion of their expression, their sensitivity to life and hardship, and by articulating hope which becomes palpable despite all suffering. The blues have successfully integrated diverse cultural contexts, respect for the diverse as well as for what we have in common. Thus it has become a symbol for what American society can be, what can be achieved, what can be called *communio*. What the world needs is such respect for the other and sensitivity towards life and community. It is our vision that the North American churches and indeed the global churches become such a *communio*. Advocating this vision is the church’s mission and it is in this mission that the church becomes a visible and inviting place of the dawning of God’s reign.

The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective¹

I. Affirmations

A. The Gospel and the Church

The church, the baptized people of God, is created by the Holy Spirit through the gospel to proclaim and to follow God's crucified Messiah. As the gathering of children, youth, men, and women who hear, believe, and receive the living Christ in Word and Sacrament, the church witnesses in word and deed to Jesus as Lord and Savior.

The proclamation of the gospel as the good news of God's salvation given in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus distinguishes the church from all other communities. The gospel liberates from sin, death, and evil and motivates the church to care for the neighbor and the earth.

The witness of this church in society flows from its identity as a community that lives from and for the gospel. Faith is active in love; love calls for justice in the relationships and structures of society. It is in grateful response to God's grace in Jesus Christ that this church carries out its responsibility for the well-being of society and the environment.

Word and Sacrament are the originating center for this church's mission in the world through its baptized members, congregations, synods, churchwide organization, social ministry organizations, and educational institutions. Through preaching, teaching, the sacraments, Scripture, and "mutual conversation and consolation,"² the church is gathered and shaped by the Holy Spirit to be a serving and liberating presence in the world. In praying for the peace of the whole world and in interceding for those who suffer and for those in authority, the church serves the world. The church gives thanks to God for the blessings of creation and prays to be empowered to do God's will in society.

B. The Church Universal

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is part of the "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic" church. Its witness in society is informed by the history and

¹ Excerpts from the Social Statement of the Division for Church in Society, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America was the first social statement adopted at the second biennial Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, August 28 – September 4, 1991.

² The Smalcald Articles, Part III, art. IV. Citations from The Book of Concord are taken from the edition by Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959).

the various theological traditions of the one church of Jesus Christ. The suffering and hope of churches in Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, and the Americas strengthen its life and calling.

As a member of the worldwide Lutheran communion, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is united with churches around the globe in a common tradition and mission. This church builds upon a legacy of more than three-hundred years of Lutheran presence in the United States and the Caribbean and affirms its cultural, racial, and ethnic diversity as vital to its identity.

C. The Church 'In' But Not 'From' the World

Through faith in the gospel the church already takes part in the reign of God announced by and embodied in Jesus. Yet, it still awaits the resurrection of the dead and the fulfillment of the whole creation in God's promised future. In this time of "now .. not yet," the church lives in two ages—the present age and the age to come. The church is 'in' the world but not 'from' the world.

The gospel does not take the church out of the world but instead calls it to affirm and to enter more deeply into the world. Although in bondage to sin and death, the world is God's good creation, where, because of love, God in Jesus Christ became flesh. The church and the world have a common destiny in the reign of God. The church acts for the sake of the world in hope and prayer: "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven."

The gospel does not allow the church to accommodate to the ways of the world. The presence and promise of God's reign makes the church restless and discontented with the world's brokenness and violence. Acting for the sake of God's world requires resisting and struggling against the evils of the world.

The church is "a new creation ... from God" (2 Cor 5:17-18), but it is still part of a fallen humanity, sharing fully the brokenness of the world. It is a community of saints, a people righteous before God on account of Jesus' self-giving love, and at the same time a community of sinners. Repentance, forgiveness, and renewal characterize the church that lives under the cross with the hope of the coming in fullness of God's reign.

D. The Church's Responsibility in Society

In witnessing to Jesus Christ, the church announces that the God who justifies expects all people to do justice. God's good and just demands address people in the obligations of their relationships and the challenges of the world. Through the divine activity of the law, God preserves creation, orders society, and promotes justice in a broken world.

God works through the family, education, the economy, the state, and other structures necessary for life in the present age. God institutes governing au-

thorities, for example, to serve the good of society.³ The church respects the God-given integrity and tasks of governing authorities and other worldly structures, while holding them accountable to God.

The church must participate in social structures critically. Not only God but also sin is at work in the world. Social structures and processes combine life-giving and life-destroying dynamics in complex mixtures and in varying degrees. The church, therefore, must unite realism and vision, wisdom and courage, in its social responsibility. It needs constantly to discern when to support and when to confront society's cultural patterns, values, and powers.

As a reconciling and healing presence, this church is called to minister to human need with compassion and imagination. It strives to pioneer new ways of addressing emerging social problems and environmental degradation. This church has a responsibility to mediate conflict and to advocate just and peaceful resolutions to the world's divisions. It should support institutions and policies that serve the common good and work with and learn from others in caring for and changing global society.

As a prophetic presence, this church has the obligation to name and denounce the idols before which people bow, to identify the power of sin present in social structures, and to advocate in hope with poor and powerless people. When religious or secular structures, ideologies, or authorities claim to be absolute, the church says, "We must obey God rather than any human authority" (Acts 5:29).⁴ With Martin Luther, this church understands that "to rebuke" those in authority "through God's word spoken publicly, boldly and honestly" is "not seditious" but "a praiseworthy, noble, and...particularly great service to God."⁵

Because the church is human as well as divine, sinful as well as holy, it too lives under the law as well as the gospel. Like all communities, the church has an institutional dimension. This church must ensure that its own corporate life, its relationships with other institutions, and its efforts to influence society are governed by God's law, express its identity, and serve its mission.

E. The Baptismal Vocation of Christians

One of the ways the church participates in society is through its members. In dying to sin and rising with Christ in baptism, Christians are called to "walk

³ The constitution of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 4.03.n., states that "this church ... shall [w]ork with civil authorities in areas of mutual endeavor, maintaining institutional separation of church and state in a relation of functional interaction." The meaning of "institutional separation and functional interaction" is developed in the statement, *The Nature of the Church and its Relationship with Government*, The Lutheran Council of the USA, 1979.

⁴ Cf. Augsburg Confession, art. XVI.

⁵ Commentary on Pss 82, Jaroslav Pelikan (ed.), *Luther's Works, vol. 13: Selected Psalms II* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1965).

in the newness of life" (Rom 6:1-11). They fulfill their baptismal vocation in ordinary life as family members, friends, citizens, workers, and participants in voluntary associations. Since "Daily life [is] the primary setting for the exercises of [the] Christian calling,"⁶ it is in that setting that Christians are to serve God and neighbor.

This church sustains its baptized members through the ministry of Word and Sacrament. The gifts of the Spirit form and transform the people of God for discipleship in daily life. In the body of Christ, the character, outlook, and moral convictions of Christians are shaped in distinctive ways. Jesus frees Christians to serve others and to walk with people who are hungry, forgotten, oppressed, and despised. The example of Jesus invites Christians to see people near and far away, people of all races, classes and cultures, friends and strangers, allies and enemies as their "neighbor."

Christians value the covenant communities of family and marriage, and they view their work as a means by which they can express their Baptismal calling. In these callings they experience both joy and brokenness and discover the sustaining power of faith. That power enables them to heal relationships, to challenge what dehumanizes, to confront the structural obstacles to justice, and to seek more humane arrangements in their places of responsibility.

Christians also can exercise their calling by being wise and active citizens. For some, this may include service in public office. Along with all citizens, Christians have the responsibility to defend human rights and to work for freedom, justice, peace, environmental well-being, and good order in public life. They are to recognize the vital role of law in protecting life and liberty and in upholding the common good. Christians need to be concerned for the methods and the content of public deliberation. They should be critical when groups of people are inadequately represented in political processes and decisions that affect their lives.

An important way that Christians carry out their citizenship is through participation in voluntary associations and movements, both religious and secular. At times, these groups may serve a prophetic function as they protest particular evils, question unexamined assumptions, challenge unjust or immoral practices, and organize for structural changes in the work place, local community, and wider world.

F. A Community of Moral Deliberation

Christians fulfill their vocation diversely and are rich in the variety of the gifts of the Spirit. Therefore, they often disagree passionately on the kind of responses they make to social questions. United with Christ and all believers

⁶ Constitution of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 4.01.e.

in baptism, Christians welcome and celebrate their diversity. Because they share common convictions of faith, they are free, indeed obligated, to deliberate together on the challenges they face in the world.

Deliberation in the church gives attention both to God's Word and God's world, as well as to the relationship between them. The church sees the world in light of God's Word, and it grasps God's Word from its context in the world. The church must rely upon God's revelation, God's gift of reason, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Scripture is the normative source in this church's deliberation. Through the study of Scripture, Christians seek to know what God requires in the church and the world. Because of the diversity in Scripture, and because of the contemporary world's distance from the biblical world, it is necessary to scrutinize the texts carefully in their own setting and to interpret them faithfully in the context of today. In their witness to God's Word, the ecumenical creeds and the Lutheran confessions guide this church's approach to Scripture, and the church's history and traditions instruct it in its deliberation.

Transformed by faith, the church in its deliberation draws upon the God-given abilities of human beings to will, to reason, and to feel. This church is open to learn from the experience, knowledge, and imagination of all people in order to have the best possible information and understanding of today's world. To act justly and effectively, this church needs to analyze social and environmental issues critically and to probe the reasons why the situation is as it is.

Deliberation in this church should include people—either in person or through their writing or other expressions—with different life-experiences, perspectives, and interests. As far as possible, people such as the following should deliberate together and with others:

- those who feel and suffer with the issue;
- those whose interests or security are at stake;
- pastors, bishops, theologians, ethicists, and other teachers in this church; advocates;
- experts in the social and natural sciences, the arts, and the humanities.

As a community of moral deliberation, the church seeks to "discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom 12:2). Christians struggle together on social questions in order to know better how to live faithfully and responsibly in their callings. Processes of deliberation need to inform and guide this church's corporate witness in society. In dealing openly and creatively with disagreement and controversy, this church hopes to contribute to the search for the individual as well as for the common good in public life.

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To Be the Church in the World

Nelvin Vos

The church since the days of the apostles has always attempted to make the gospel known in the society in which it is located. It has practiced "contextual mediation" from the time of the book of Acts to the present. In fact, the current theme of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) prominently visible at the recent Churchwide Assembly is "Hope for a New Century: Making Christ Known."

The church has times in which it focuses more on its inner identity and meaning than on outside concerns. It also has periods in which it reaches out, ventures forth, and listens—often tentatively but nevertheless engages in societal issues, conflicts, and dynamics within its context. Or, more likely, the societal issues are of such magnitude that they demand attention; they cannot be ignored by the church. Such engagement is often marked by struggle and tension. But it is buttressed by the conviction that Christ is to be made known not just within the fellowship of the faithful but also within the larger society.

The ELCA, from my observation, is at such a juncture. In its official documents and still more in its actions at the church-wide, regional, and congregational levels, as well as in its individual members, the ELCA has been endeavoring to be the church *in* the world. In brief, the church is heeding the admonition of Dietrich Bonhoeffer written during his imprisonment more than 50 years ago:

God cannot be used as a stop-gap. We must not wait until we are at the end of our tether: he must be found at the center of life: in life, and not only in death; in health and vigor, and not only in suffering; in activity, and not only in sin. The ground for this lies in the revelation of God in Christ. Christ is the center of life.¹

The ELCA Context

We shall look first, then, at the ELCA constitution. The statement of purpose reads:

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (London: SCM Press, 1953), p. 104. Cf. *I Have Heard the Cry of My People. Proceedings of the Eighth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation, LWF Report No. 28/29* (Geneva: LWF, 1990) p. 16, which states that the community of faith "exists not for its own sake nor merely for more efficiency; it exists for mission and service in the world."

The Church is a people created by God in Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, called and sent to bear witness to God's creative, redeeming and sanctifying activity in the world.

Those three words "in the world" at the end of this rising crescendo of verbs—created, empowered, called, and sent—continue to permeate further sections of the constitution. For example:

Participate in God's mission this church shall:
Nurture its members in the World of God so as to grow in faith and hope and love, to see daily life as the primary setting for the exercise of their Christian calling, and to use the gifts of the Spirit for their life together and for their calling in the world.

It is important to note that the underlying theme, "in the world," was not at all prominent in the constitutions of the three predecessor bodies. But here this pivotal motif is woven throughout the fundamental documents.

It is also to be noted that this emphasis is in counterpoint with article VII of the Augsburg Confession, which affirms that the church is "the assembly of believers among whom the gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel." Such an understanding was particularly needed in the 16th century because, as church historian Frederick K. Wentz comments, the Reformers "were then preoccupied with discerning the true church in the midst of chaos and opposing an established church, which made many false claims."² We still need to proclaim such distinctive themes as *solia gratia*, *sola fide*, and *sola scriptura*, for they mark the identity of the Lutheran tradition. But recent writers such as Loren Mead³ and others have suggested, that the church is in a context more like that of the New Testament—in an indifferent and sometimes hostile environment—rather than that of the Christendom context of the Reformation.

What the ELCA is attempting to do, while continuing to underline the necessity of the gathered church, is to recover the emphasis on the church as scattered, or more accurately, the church dispersed and planted, where 99 percent of the believers are 99 percent of the time in the arenas of their callings in daily life.⁴ The description used within the ELCA—"ministry in daily life"—is in contrast to the formerly used term—"the ministry of the laity"—which speaks of the distinction between clergy and laypersons. Ministry in daily life not only includes all of the people of God called in their baptism but also reflects a stance which inherently implies contextual theology and the importance of the experience of Christians.

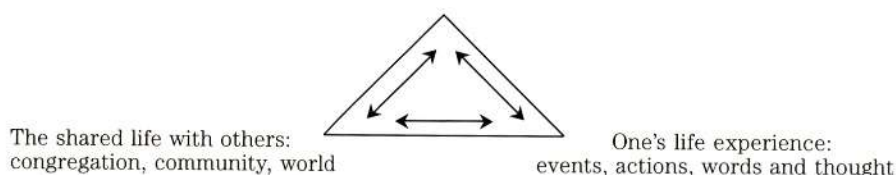
² Frederick K. Wentz, "Where Are the People?" *Lutheran Partners*, May/June 1991, p. 31.

³ Loren Mead, *The Once and Future Church* (Bethesda, Md.: Alban Institute), 1991.

⁴ "For Luther the laity and not the clergy was at the core of the Christian communio, shaping the world through its work and ideas," Ingun Montgomery, "The Understanding of the Church in the Sixteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," in Heinrich Holze (ed.), *The Church as Communion*, LWF Documentation 42/1997 (Geneva: LWF, 1997), p. 165.

A recent ELCA educational resource aimed at congregational study groups, *Connections: Faith and Life* (1997), written jointly with Dr. Norma Cook Everist of Wartburg Seminary has as its springboard the following schema.⁵

The faith tradition: Scriptures, articles of faith, church history



Note the interaction of all three with one another. The study probes deeply into the Bible and Luther's Large and Small Catechisms. At the same time, the members of the group reflect on their daily life experiences and also visit and discuss the workplaces or the daily areas of ministry of each participant. Such interplay deliberately challenges Christians to be salt and leaven and light in their particular settings, to be the church in the world.

I would venture to say that in the past, the three dimensions most likely would have been placed in hierarchical order: first the faith tradition, then the community of believers, and perhaps, if at all, life experiences.⁶

Let me add quickly that I am aware that such emphasis on life experiences of Christians is extremely problematic to many. I would respond that the roots of the emphasis are not first of all the modern idol of subjectivity or the American heresy of hyper-individualism. Rather, its sources are the re-emphasis on the first article, the doctrine of creation (the infinite may be revealed in the finite), and the third article, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit ("...you are in the Spirit, if the Spirit dwells in you—Rom 8:9). Some would say this emphasis is a re-balancing of the Lutheran tradition to focus too narrowly on the second article.

To take seriously the ongoing work of God in the created world and to be open to the Holy Spirit working in each of us inevitably moves believers to understand and live as the church in the world. We become the fingers and feet of the body of Christ, in the times and places in which each of us is located.

The scattered, the dispersed, the planted people of God, whether consciously perceived or not, are continuing to recognize what God is up to in their experience and give witness to be the church in the world.

⁵ *Connections: Faith and Life* (Chicago: ELCA Division for Congregational Ministries, 1997).

⁶ Cf. Wolfgang Greive who describes "a down to earth approach to ecclesiology," in Wolfgang Greive (ed.), *Communion, Community, Society, LWF Studies 1/1998* (Geneva: LWF, 1998), p. 15.

The Smaller Context

Based on my own observations and on consultations with about a dozen ELCA leaders in Pennsylvania, some of the dominant social issues, conflicts and dynamics in this region are as follows:

Changing demographics

- *Multicultural.* The fairly homogeneous population, primarily Pennsylvania German, has changed to a more diverse, pluralistic, multicultural mix. For example, the school populations of both Allentown and Reading, cities of about 100,000 people, are now approximately 40 percent Latinos.
- *Urban.* There is a distinct movement from urban to suburban. This movement continues with suburban communities now ironically resisting malls being built in their neighborhood. Inner-city churches struggle with their mission. Another result is that city schools have a declining tax base with which to support public education, while the outlying schools have much larger budgets. The gap widens.
- *Rural.* There is a movement from family farms to larger and fewer farms. The U.S. Census Bureau in 1990 estimated that 3.7 million citizens of Pennsylvania live in rural areas, giving it the largest rural population of any state in the United States. Every county except Philadelphia has areas categorized as rural. But the large rural population is rapidly disappearing. Such a movement involves both a different work ethic and a change in ecological values.
- *Aging.* Statistics show an aging population. Pennsylvania is second to Florida in the percentage of people over age 65. Some congregations feel a sense of despair with no future. One leader said, "If a dozen members were to die tomorrow, this congregation would need to close since its support is primarily from those above age 65."

A changing economic base

The economic base used to be based on heavy industry (Mack Trucks, Bethlehem Steel, for example), garment-making, and slate and coal mining. All of these industries, formerly with powerful unions, have closed or moved south to cheaper labor. In their place have come some light industry and low-paying service jobs, similar to what can be found in the rest of the USA, and distribution (40 percent of the nation's consumers live within a matter of hours; huge facilities have few employees because of high automation). One church leader accurately pointed out that, here as elsewhere, prisons are one of the fastest-growing industries.

Health care

Health care institutions now are merging or collaborating with one another. This includes not only community organizations but also the ELCA social service organizations which have a high concentration in this region. The need for efficient operation and the advantage of providing a continuum of care have become crucial issues which all health care institutions must confront, including the large ELCA-related rehabilitation complex, Good Shepherd, whose board of trustees I chair.

Hate crimes/violence

Hate crimes are reported much more frequently than before: swastikas on synagogues; words and actions against racial minorities and gays and lesbians; meetings of the white supremacists within miles of our home. Pennsylvania is one of the states at the top of the list in the number of hate crimes reported.

Lutheran identity

As a member of the faculty and former vice president and dean of an ELCA-related college, and as board chair of an ELCA-related social service institution, I recognize a question that surfaces frequently, both internally and externally: "What's Lutheran about this place?" Formerly, the leadership of such institutions were themselves Lutheran while now the staff is broadly ecumenical, if not secular.

How the ELCA is Engaging these Challenges

Some examples of how the ELCA is engaging these challenges, both by itself and in collaboration, will now be briefly described. But it must first be said that the church often seems at a loss of how to meet these challenges; more seriously, frequently the church does not recognize or refuses to recognize where the cutting edges are.

Changing demographics

- *Multicultural.* Reading and Allentown both have small but growing Latino congregations, and several of the Anglo congregations are attempting to reach out to the Latinos. The Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod produced a Latino strategy two years ago but still needs to be more specific in implementing its goals. An annual Faith and Leadership Academy which I have

coordinated for the past six years educates laity in their calling both within the church and in their daily lives.

- *Urban.* A number of congregations in the area sponsor tutorial programs for disadvantaged youngsters. The parish I belong to has an after-school program for children from AIDS-related families.
- *Rural.* The Evangelical Lutheran Coalition for Mission in Appalachia is a coalition of ELCA synods, church-wide units, seminaries, and agencies, all ministering in Appalachia, a large area of the United States in which many poor rural people live.

Among its many activities, the ecumenical partnerships with the Episcopal Appalachian Ministry and the Coalition for Appalachian Ministry have resulted in several educational events. Each event provides contextual education for lay leaders and clergy new to the region based on the principle that the more one understands the context of a particular ministry the more effective that ministry may become.

- *Aging.* A few congregations are making particular efforts to reach adults and young families but the results have not been fruitful.

Health care

The institutions are emphasizing in their mission statements and in their many-faceted activities that the quality of compassionate care is still primary, no matter what major structural changes are taking place. The jury is still out on this matter.

Hate crimes/violence

A heavily-attended workshop in Allentown in 1997, "The Dynamics of Hate and Hate Groups," co-sponsored by a number of ELCA organizations featured state spokespersons as well as religious leaders.

The Institute for Jewish-Christian Understanding at Muhlenberg College has for the past 10 years not only worked with local, regional and national relations between Christians and Jews but has also been a vehicle for educating the public about hate crimes of all kinds.

Various faith groups, including the ELCA, have been invited to work with the United Way, a broadly-based community organization, to motivate youth to subscribe to "the Pledge," a commitment to tolerance and respect for others as well as a repudiation of violence.

In 1997, the Faith and Life Forum sponsored a conference at Muhlenberg College on gays and lesbians in relation to faith in daily life. Focussing on personal experience (listening to gays and lesbians; those who believe homosexual behavior is sinful; parents of gays and lesbians; counselors; and workplace personnel), the forum later turns to biblical study. The entire process is

that of "moral deliberation"; specifically this model employs personal reflection, journaling, sharing in twos rather than plenary sessions which often in the past became acrimoniously ineffective.

Lutheran identity

Instead of locating Lutheran identity in persons (most Lutheran institutions still continue to have Lutheran chaplains), the emphasis is on objectives which flow from the tradition of Lutheranism. Therefore a mission statement and its accompanying goals of an ELCA college include something like the following: Doctrine of creation as the basis of liberal learning; sense of vocation, both individually and corporately; passion for justice; pursuit of wisdom, not merely information; ethical reflection and community discourse; diversity which contributes to community; most of all, service to others.

The Larger Context

The global dimension will be the most brief section of this survey. Parenthetically, when I first came to the Northeast in 1965 and noticed that very few students studied abroad in contrast to students from Midwest colleges, my Midwest upbringing prompted me to comment a bit too bluntly: "The Midwest knows it's provincial; the Northeast is often too provincial to recognize its provinciality!"

Yet there are a few signs of awareness of the global church. World Hunger and Lutheran World Relief are the two most visible experiences of global interrelationship on the grassroots level. Both are supported very generously in this region.

The NEPA synod is at the beginning stages of linking with three companion churches: the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Argentina, the Evangelische-Lutherische Landeskirche Sachsens in Germany, and the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovenia. In each of these relationships, the guidelines are to be equal partners, walking together in our common faith. With the first two churches, exchange visits, including youth, have occurred. A congregation-to-congregation linkage with Argentina has begun. The Slovenia connection is in its very early stage, but has great potential since the Lehigh Valley has several congregations with Windish roots.

This region of the church is making forays in collaboration with other churches globally. But the implications of communion including accountability are pathways not yet explored.

The motifs of my own journey and of this paper are reflected in two citations from our common reading: "The ministry of the baptized is the primary

way in which the church works in the world.”⁷ And, even more, in a quotation. Mary Solberg cites: “For the transcendent can be encountered only in the particularity of a human situation. This is the significance of the Incarnation.”⁸

⁷ Craig Nesson, “We are the Body of Christ: Ecclesiology for an ELCA in Mission,” *Lutheran Partners*, May/June, 1999, p. 29.

⁸ James H. Cone, *Speaking the Truth* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1986), p. 115; quoted by Mary M. Solberg, “Working on the Church: A contribution to Lutheran Ecclesiology, *JHLT*, vol. 2:1 (1994), p. 63.

Being the Church in California

Walter M. Stuhr

The following profiles of Lutheran ministries in the San Francisco Bay Area of California are presented as examples of "how the church understands itself" in this area.

At the Synod Level

- *Sierra Pacific Synod*
"The Missional Church"

In his report to the 1999 synodical assembly, Bishop Robert Mattheis reported that the Synod Council had reduced the synod's mission statement to five words: "In Christ...a Missional Church." The Missional Church asks, he writes:

What is God calling us to be and do? What is God doing and how do we participate faithfully in God's mission? These questions stand over against the questions of a maintenance church that asks, "What do people want and what will they support?"

Simply put, in the Missional Church every member is in mission. Here consumers of religion become disciples who care for one another and teach others the faith while they live out the meaning of their faith in family, congregation, community, and nation. Here in the Missional Church the pastor's primary role is first to equip members to live out the reign of God in their lives as disciples of Jesus who in turn invite and equip others to become disciples.

Bishop Mattheis identified four specific "Missional Challenges and Opportunities" in the local and global communities: racism; gay/lesbian issues: poverty issues; relief work. He noted that "we are about to change the culture of our congregations," and warned of the "difficulty and potential for conflict inherent in such a shift in thinking and acting."

To undergird this vision, the bishop sent a copy of "Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America" (Darrell L. Gulder, editor) to each of the synod's parish pastors. In addition, there have been a number of special training events. Bishop Mattheis has also proposed a campaign to raise significant intervention for congregations eager to adapt, but lacking the financial resources for profound change.

The synod itself has restructured to implement this missional emphasis, by replacing the more typical program committees by three discipling teams. They are:

- 1) *Word and Sacrament*: to equip the baptized for baptismal living;
- 2) *Witness and Service*: to proclaim publicly the faith, in word and deed;
- 3) *Leadership*: to support rostered leaders.

It should be noted, however that the synod retains the rather complex administrative/governance structure of synod assembly and council, bishop and executive and support staff, and standing committees on consultation, discipline, finance, nominations, synod assembly and documents, and mutual ministry.

At the Congregational Level

- *Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Oakland*
"In the City for Good"

Roots—Organized in 1929 as an African American congregation of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. Named after the church in New Orleans of which many of the founders had been members. Entered the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) as a member of the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches.

Membership—Has 226 baptized members, all but eight of whom are African-American, most of them second- and third-generation Lutherans. Large majority are 40 or older, but almost 20 are high school age. Only four members live in the same zip code as the church, many having been forced out by redevelopment. Is the "regional African-American Lutheran congregation," a commuter congregation.

Pastor—Ordained 1981, in the Lutheran Church in America (LCA). Called to Bethlehem in 1994, to lead the congregation in re-rooting itself in West Oakland. Was serving in a similar situation in Washington D.C; that congregation in a merger process at the time, leaving the pastor open to a new call.

Context—West and North Oakland include urban redevelopment and decay, residential and industrial use, the Port of Oakland, and the downtown center of government and commerce. New single-family housing development has potential for "gentrification"; its proximity to downtown Oakland and rapid transit service to San Francisco appealing to "yuppies."

Tradition—Provides a ministry of worship, education, and pastoral care to African-American Lutherans, and non-Lutherans who might be attracted to it. Primarily Sunday morning programming to accommodate commuter membership. Worship characterized as "confessionally Lutheran, but contextually relevant": ELCA African-American service book and hymnal, "This Far by Faith," is used. Also a Wednesday noon Bible study, and a women's group called the Hagar Circle.

Change—Outreach to the West/North Oakland communities. Goal: to bring neighborhood people into contact with Bethlehem by providing community services, including:

Bethlehem Health Ministry: from screening for breast cancer to laying on of hands and anointing with oil in worship services.

Bethlehem Computer Academy: four work stations, a volunteer faculty, serving over 100 persons ages 8-80.

Bethlehem Outreach to the Port of Oakland: a ministry to personnel of ships entering the port.

West Oakland Charter School: a public school that rents Bethlehem facilities; opened in fall 1999, with 50 sixth graders. Pastor to be available to minister to the families of the children.

Commentary—A poster at the entrance to Bethlehem announces the ELCA's "In the City for Good" program, "Transforming Individuals, Congregations and Communities." "For good" means that Bethlehem is determined to be rooted in its community for the long term; and that it intends to contribute to the well-being of the city,

This is a corporate venture. A sister-congregation, Resurrection, provides financial support; another, St. Andrew in San Mateo, provides computers for persons completing 50 hours in the Computer Academy. The Sierra Pacific Synod sponsors the staff for the Port Authority ministry. The director for the Computer Academy is a student in the Basic Theological Education for Ministry program of Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary.

Bethlehem has been very successful in reaching out to the community with its service programs. But bringing the people into worship and membership is slow. "It is hard for a Lutheran congregation to get non-Lutheran African-Americans to take a look at its ministry," said the pastor. (In addition, the Lutheran African-Americans are comfortable with things as they are.) It may be easier to interest incoming "yuppies" who have a Lutheran or other traditional church background. In fact, the next new-member class includes four white "yuppies," perhaps signaling a new opportunity and challenge for change!

- *Zion Lutheran Church, San Jose*
"Spiritual Fitness for the Silicon Valley"

Roots—Organized in 1959 as an American Lutheran Church. Part of suburban Lutheran expansion of the 1950s.

Membership—260 members, about 5 percent Hispanic. Good cross-section of ages and family situations; most live within 6-10 minutes driving time.

Pastor—Ordained in the mid-60s, in the LCA. Called to Zion in 1989. Fit congregation's "Lutheran pastor" profile: strong in preaching, worship leadership, pastoral care. Pastor on leave from call, following a divorce, looking for a new start, near his children.

Context—Parish is community within 6-10 minute driving range, with about 20,000 people. Suburban San Jose, part of what had been the orchards of Santa Clara Valley; now the legendary Silicon Valley, the symbol of high-tech industry and lifestyle. "Leading the world into the next millennium," at cost of long hours, high stress, limited family life.

Tradition—Typical suburban Lutheran parish ministry: inner-oriented, maintenance-driven.

Change—"From maintenance-driven to mission-driven. Balance the emphasis on worship and fellowship with greater emphasis on discipleship (spiritual maturity), evangelism (outreach), and ministry (service)."

"We are trying, to build a spiritual foundation, to help people build spiritually fit lives. This is what the church can do, that other social institutions cannot." (Model: the Saddleback ministry of Richard Warren, described in *The Purpose-Driven Church*) Recent sermon outline:

How to be Spiritually Fit in Silicon Valley:

1. The most important task of the church is to help people build a strong spiritual foundation.
2. The spiritually fit come to learn that spirituality is not an event or two. It is a lifelong process.
3. The spiritually fit understand their lives are part of God's Plan.
4. The spiritually fit learn to turn God's plan into healthy programs.

Zion's "Spiritual Fitness" program, intensively experienced in Christian Life and Service Seminars (CLASS) :

CLASS 101: To lead people to Christ and membership at Zion.

CLASS 201: To grow people to spiritual maturity. (Four Spiritual Habits—time with God's Word, prayer, tithing, participating in God's family)

CLASS 302: To equip people with the skills they need for ministry.

CLASS 401: To enlist people to the worldwide mission of sharing Christ. (Note progression from being drawn inward to the congregation to being sent outward to ministry and mission.)

Worship announced by banners at two exits off busy thoroughfare: "Happy Hour, Every Sunday; Psalm 122.1"; "Jesus—the Birth of Hope. 8:30, 9:45, 11:00." The 8:30 a.m. and 11 a.m. services use contemporary Lutheran liturgies: Mary Haugen; With One Voice. The 9:45 a.m. service is designed for "seekers" with "blended liturgy" of Gather, Word, Meal, Send. Upbeat, praise service, with guitar, drum, keyboard; hymns and sermon outline projected onto pull-down screen. (Largest attendance) The 6 p.m., service uses ELCA Spanish language hymnal; leader is Hispanic student. There is a 9 a.m. weekday time of prayer at the church.

Other programs designed to get people to "come and hear":

English as Second Language instruction—currently enrolling 35-40 students;

Learning Center—with six computers donated by Hewlett Packard, serving ESL students neighborhood kids, as well as member children and adults;

Community Garden: space offered @ \$ 10/plot, including water.

Commentary—The pastor reports that learning to be a mission-driven church in the Silicon Valley has involved "reinventing" himself as pastor, as well as the congregation. He acknowledges that some members are troubled by the

new direction of ministry; in those cases he appeals to the trust built up over his 10 years of ministry at Zion. Zion is the congregation that seems to be most intentionally following the bishop's vision of a missional church. This includes setting aside its constitution and becoming the "visioning team," with planning and implementation delegated to the ministry team, composed of the pastor and the leaders for membership, discipleship, ministry, mission, and worship. It is still "a work in progress," but there is a sense of progress being made.

Non-Congregational Ministries

- *Extraordinary Candidacy Process, and*
- *Lutheran Lesbian And Gay Ministries*
"Church, Culture, and Conflict"

Context—Since its inception in 1988, the ELCA has been involved in an intense conflict over the issue of openly gay men and lesbians in its ordained ministry. Homosexuality as a current issue arose in the larger society, but the same "sides" are present in the church—strongly pro, strongly anti, as well as a large ambivalent group. The debate as it relates to ordination, however, is unique to the church, where the highly symbolic nature of ordained ministry, plus its highly regulated status, have made it the "litmus test" for the sincerity and strength of opposing sides.

Two strong currents have emerged from the struggle. One is an increasing solidification of the traditional wall of separation between homosexuality and ordained ministry, by church regulation and enforcement. The result is the removal of a significant number of previously ordained and serving ministers, and the exclusion of a significant number of candidates for ordination, as well as the removal of a number of congregations. The second is a counter current of rising consciousness of a loss of the church of effective pastors, promising candidates, and vital congregations, and a growing questioning of the underlying doctrinaire rejection of homosexuality as such. The ELCA is thus in the uncomfortable position of rigidly enforcing regulations, the rationale for which it is actively questioning.

The ministers—It is not surprising that these currents are especially evident in the San Francisco Bay Area, focus of the societal expression of the general issue of homosexuality. Lutheran Lesbian and Gay Ministries (LLGM) and the Extraordinary Candidacy Project (ECP), while not confined to the Bay Area in scope, originated there. The ECP continues to be based there, while LLGM also has offices in St. Paul and Washington D.C. And while they are not officially recognized programs of the ELCA, their participants, on the whole, acknowledge the ELCA as their church family, even though some are estranged from or have been rejected by it.

All of the ministries profiled are responding to their socio-cultural contexts: an increasingly multicultural population; a variety of lifestyles; urban/suburban dynamics; extremes of affluence and poverty. How can a congregation bring in new diverse people; how can the church reach out to serve the people, and society, where they are? The synod calls for a "Missional Church"; each ministry has its own articulation of what it is about.

In a recent letter to alumni, the President of the University of Chicago wrote, "It has been the central paradox of my time as President that, in order to preserve and strengthen the University of Chicago, we have had to imagine and to implement change." The churches in this survey also value their traditions; they too, have learned that in order to preserve and strengthen their traditions, they must imagine and implement change. In so doing they are finding that tradition can provide resources for, as well as inhibit change.

All ministries, congregational and non-congregational, must change: to survive, but also "to be the church." The ones profiled have accepted that reality and are in the process of the planning and implementing change. While not "typical" of the ministries in their area ; they may be "typical" of those that are accepting the challenge.

Society views some expressions of the church as major "players" in society, particularly the archdiocese of San Francisco. It also views the church as "news" in its mainline/evangelical, liberal/conservative conflicts over issues such as homosexuality and abortion. To a lesser extent it views the church as spiritual home and moral compass for a significant portion of the population, but as such, competes with spiritual and ethical movements totally unrelated to the institutional church.

Church members, as a whole, undoubtedly see their churches as a haven from the chaos of society, a community in which they are valued for who they are, and a place where they are reminded and instructed relative to their faith commitments. Pastors seek to broaden that view. Most members would probably agree with the pastor who wrote, "We as a faith community have something to add to the civic, corporate, and political discussions of this world." But it would be a stretch for most to agree, as she continued, "I look forward to the shaping and reshaping of our community...as we ponder being repairers and restorers of the world around us." As one respondent observed, "what people really want in their church, is a place 'to grow old with people just like me.'"

The tensions include:

- The welcoming of diversity, as long as "they" don't make "us" change.
- Having to implement new directions, with old institutional structures and practices.
- Encouraging local initiative, within churchwide regulation.

In other words, the analysis varies: sometimes it is tension between differing views of what the "official understanding" is; sometimes it is the result of

people being comfortable with holding on to they "work for us" practices that conflict with theory; and sometimes it arises from trying to make institutional structures designed for previous practice, work for new theory.

Officially, in the ELCA, the church is one church, existing as an "interdependent partnership" of congregations, synods, and churchwide organization, under the rule and authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. The workability of this ecclesiology is most apparent in the Basic Theological Education of Ministry program. Its validity is most challenged in the Lutheran Lesbian and Gay Ministries and the Extraordinary Candidacy Project.

There would be little debate among church people in our area that the church exists both for itself and society at large. The shape and proportion of that duality is the focus of debate. The debate illustrates what the missional church identifies as the tension between "the regulative denomination and the lifestyle congregations. Congregations want to and are encouraged to respond to their own contexts. In doing so, they tend to develop conclusions about the nature and structure of the church, which may challenge the policies and procedures which define and insure denominational identity.

None of the people with whom I spoke identified what they are doing with the "idea of communion," even when prompted. That the ministries, including non-congregational ones, have a shared communal experience, in worship, fellowship, and mutual caring, is assumed. But the concept of this communal life evidencing a particular quality, or "communion," that is to be experienced by the members and demonstrated to society, is either absent, or simply unarticulated as such. The quotation from the San Francisco pastor, seems consistent with the concept: "I look forward to the shaping and reshaping of our community...as we ponder being repairers and restorers of the world around us."

The main issues under discussion:

- Homosexuality and ordained ministry;
- effective outreach to non-white populations;
- what to do with dying congregations—revive or bury;
- non-Christian religions; non-church related practices of spirituality;
- distinguishing among: church life, church work, and church organization;
- how to resolve these and other issues.

Factors which seem to influence the resolution:

- The particular community context, and how well it is understood;
- historical roots and traditions of ministry - to be built upon, or transcended;
- resources available: personnel, facilities, finances;
- pastoral leadership: ability to articulate a vision, identify resources, and mobilize participation;
- risk toleration: calculating, allowing, taking risk.



Communion, Community, Society in the Northwest?

James Y.K. Moy

How does the church understand itself in the Northwest? How does one define the church?

It is ironic that when going beyond United States territory the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) through its Division for Global Ministries has the wisdom to encourage overseas churches to fend for themselves in contrast to previous paternalistic missionary endeavors. The idea of encouraging self-support among indigenous churches works. To be sure there are risks, but they are worth it. It is, therefore, not surprising to learn that Lutheran churches are growing in significant numbers on the African, Asian, and South American continents. We are beginning to turn Cambodian ministry over to Cambodian leadership, Hmong outreach to Hmong leaders, and Laotian ministry to Lao leaders.

Yet we have a long way to go. In dealing with a population largely made up of migrant workers, immigrants on welfare, or hourly workers, the white middle-class world might as well be on a different planet. The rules, expectations, and procedures we outline for mission outreach for the poor are absurd.

It does not matter statistically how many calls are made in a day or week. It is irrelevant to talk about family units. It is a pipe dream to talk about purchasing property for a church in areas we have not trodden. It is a mistake to prepare seminarians to minister in poor communities and expect a standard of living way beyond those to whom we are proclaiming the Good News. Synodical guidelines for the middle class simply do not make sense to people who are struggling to exist. I believe our problem in reaching out to different racial, immigrant, economic, and social classes is structurally determined by who we are, and until we recognize this we can make little advances for the kingdom in this time and place.

It was not a far-fetched idea when an African-American pastor said, "Jim, if the Division for Ministry and the ELCA would set aside its candidacy process for five years, and let us (the African-American community) recruit the pastors and leaders we need, I guarantee you we can triple the numbers of black pastors in this church!" For the sake of order I am doubtful if the church will allow that.

The outsider and non-Christian could not care less about how we define the church. Communion or community? So what? That's your problem however you define it. The structures we have chosen to live with and which we use to

define others tell them far more about what we expect and want from this life.

Now, on to the nature of the church, and more specifically, to the northwestern part of the country: here 97.7 percent of the population in our synod is unchurched. We have a situation—not unlike what Kennon Callahan and others have said—that is akin to the challenge faced by the first-century church. Living our faith by example provides a powerful testimony to the truth of the Christian witness.

Religious preferences projected for the Lutheran church in the synod by the year 2002 are below that of the national average.¹ The general population in the Northwest does not know us. Are we still concerned with “church” or “communion?” Our synod assembly voted to support the *Concordat* in 1996. It reversed that vote in 1997 and decided to postpone future discussions indefinitely on the *Call to Common Mission* at the 1999 assembly. The behavior is like a family fighting among its members, and it is quite obvious to the world around it. It is easy for the outsider casually to dismiss us. Who defines communion or community?

Attitudes toward the bishop’s office among clergy are mixed from those who are supportive to those who are passive. Organizational cultural differences from predecessor church bodies are significant and provide much of the tension in our debates on church growth, ecumenical issues, worship and music style, gay and lesbian issues. As an institutional church we are a long way from community. The synod is predominantly Caucasian. We are a mix of Norwegian piety (from the Haugian Tradition) which favored decentralization and low liturgical emphasis, and some from the Lutheran Free Church with a strong congregational-based ecclesiology. We have a mix of Augustana Lutherans (the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Church) who came from the internecine wars in the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, and former United Lutheran Church in America clergy from the General Synod which with Augustana had formed the LCA (a church body perceived locally as more “liberal” and authoritarian than the ALC).

Lay members, in general, are vaguely familiar with the larger church but their energies are mostly concentrated within the congregation. Clergy seek to be involved in the greater work of the church and when they are impressed with what the church is doing.² But these opportunities do not come often.

¹ Percept Study 1996. Percept Inc., Costa Mesa, Calif. Demographic and ethnographic data supplied by Percept on contract with the NWWA synod. In Percept’s Ethos 90 survey, respondents were asked to identify the general religious affiliation that best represented their preference. These responses were projected for “People Areas” that provide a uniform way for making comparisons across our geography. The national average as a percentage of all households, which were used as benchmarks for this study in 1996, was 6 percent for Lutherans. The preference for “Lutheran” in our synod showed 87.2 percent below this average.

² This attitude was especially noted at a deans meeting where a pastor who was a voting member at the recent ELCA assembly gave a glowing report about how much she learned and how impressed she was about the extensive work of the church.

Clergy from the Free Church define the church as the congregation and they resist invitations and announcements from the synod and region and consider those activities unnecessary. They define communion narrowly. We are a synod in transition and our bishop is quick to remind its leadership that we are a mission field ripe for the harvest. There is resistance to the reality of being in a mission situation.

How does the church understand itself in society? We are basically provincial and cannot see beyond the walls of our existing church buildings. But we work hard behind these walls.³ There are a few pastors and lay leaders who see the need to extend the church beyond its walls, who wish to engage in community organizing in dealing with grave issues—homeless teenagers, victims of abuse and domestic violence, broken homes, union and management labor relations, interfaith issues, affordable housing, drug and alcohol issues, family and children at risk, peace and gender issues. But there are not many of them and those who do are lonely.⁴ We have the luxury of a continuing debate on the value of contemporary worship styles and music in contrast to the more formal traditional Lutheran worship style. Most all the congregations practice communion every Sunday. Is this “communion” as defined by Wolfgang Greive?

There is little debate (and probably little agreement) on the importance of adult baptism as a measure of effectiveness in ministry. Our leaders do not talk about saving souls. Why is that? I struggle with this question and conclude there is “cultural memory” at work here. Lutherans emerging from the state churches in Europe did not worry much about evangelism or stewardship. The presumption was that everyone living under a principality was either Lutheran or Catholic. What is unique in the Jungian cultural sense of identity is that these lessons are subliminally (or subconsciously) passed on from one generation to the next without effort or intentionality. Most of the debates and differences in worship practices and music are shaped by cultural biases. The sooner we recognize that the sooner we can become a truly “multicultural church.” We will do much better in Christian witness if we recognize this.

We are working to overcome the cultural resistance to Christianity here in the Northwest. When people wanted to become Christians in the first century they were first invited to study the words of the apostles for an intense period of time; they were mentored by followers of Jesus who cared for them and demonstrated what life in the Spirit can be like; and then, they were given the opportunity to serve those in need as an example of the Christlike life. It is

³ We work harder...but not necessarily smarter.

⁴ Pastor John Lindsay had been trying to develop support for faith-based community organizing for more than 12 years and was ready to give up until more recently when he was joined by Pastor Ron Moe-Lobeda joined him.

only after these people had demonstrated their commitment to this faith that they were baptized. We have introduced the Catechumenate in the synod and it is slowly being adopted as a way of catechizing and reaching out to the unchurched.⁵ The quality of faithful commitments is what we are seeking we are not seeking to impress the world with growth statistics.

In spite of the negative picture portrayed above, benevolence dollars have been increasing over the years and the synod has operated in the black. Our research data suggests we are in an area where giving to religious, charitable causes, and education are significantly above the national average.⁶ So I have mixed feelings in sharing this report as the sum total of these funds still does not meet half of all the visions and needs that have been presented to this church. That Lutherans give less than three percent of their income to their church is testimony to the cultural memory alluded to earlier. Is this "communion" or "community" and church?

⁵ We have held two Catechumenate workshops for 14 congregations over a two-year period. Ten congregations are now engaged in the Catechumenate.

⁶ Based upon the average annual household income of \$65,240 and the likely contribution behavior in the area, the overall religious giving *potential* in the synod can be described as *very high*. Households contributing more than \$500 per year to churches are near U.S. average (31 percent).

God Calls Us¹

We understand that the present *reality of the world* involves significant changes in our society, economy, and culture. Technological innovations, globalization, economic and political uncertainties, and shifting morals and values have increased the sense of insecurity for many people. We have been falsely taught to derive our identity only from our work—yet jobs are not secure. These changes confront us with the reality that the needs of the world and our opportunities for mission are found on our doorsteps and not simply at a distance.

We believe that the *reality of Christ* is that God promises to be with us unconditionally in the midst of the changes in our world. The church is called to name those things which cause us to be less than human. The church is called to proclaim the truth of the gospel to others and to live according to it ourselves. The church is called to stand in solidarity with and to welcome into our midst all those who are marginalized because of sin and who experience injustice. The cross of Christ stands opposed to any ideology which proclaims that people can earn salvation by hard work or positive thinking. The cross of Christ stands opposed to any ideology which treats people as commodities.

Glossary

Mission: The mission of God is the preservation and redemption of all creation. This is God's mission and God calls the whole church to participate in this mission. It is God's mission to the whole person and the whole world.

Ministry: How mission is carried out. Lutherans understand that all people (not just those ordained) are to be in ministry, fulfilling the mission. This is called the priesthood of all believers.

Scandal of the cross: St. Paul says, "For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing....But we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block" (The Greek word is *scandalon*, which means scandal) (1 Cor 1:18, 23a). Society and the world has always had its standards and expectations for people and has always trusted only in itself. Those who trust God's grace and take the cross of Jesus Christ are considered fools and even experience hostility from the world and society. So the scandal of the cross, or stumbling block, to society is that life which Christ's followers (disciples) have chosen: the cross, daring to live for others, and trust in God's grace.

¹ Excerpts from the Evangelical Declaration of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada embraced by the ELCIC at the National Convention, July 1997, Toronto, Ontario.

Reflections on Church and Society in Canada

Arthur Leichnitz

"From far and wide, O Canada"
(from Canada's national anthem)

Although Canada and the United States share the North American continent, and although their economies, media, and popular culture are strongly interrelated, there are distinct differences between the two countries and societies.

Canada is a middle power on the world stage. Its power comes from membership in the G7, the Commonwealth, and the Francophonie; support of the UN and peacekeeping; and a willingness sometimes to distinguish itself from U.S. policies (e.g. Vietnam, Cuba, land mines). Historically and institutionally, Canada's links have been more to Europe (Great Britain and France) than to the U.S., and strong links with Asia are now emerging.

Canadians have an expectation that government should exercise some authority to provide moral direction (discipline, order, responsibility, obedience) for the society it governs. Thus Canadians accept a high degree of gun control and limits on public access to intimate details of court proceedings. Canadians also strongly support social programs such as universal health care and pre-university education, and transfer payments to assist poorer provinces.

The great tensions in Canadian society concern French-English relations; regional differences (and therefore federal-provincial rivalries); relations with aboriginal peoples; and (more recently) questions about social policy. In a country of two confederating cultures in 1867, successive waves of immigrants (primarily from all parts of Europe and more recently from Asia) have produced a strongly multicultural population. Where the United States has promoted a "melting pot," Canada has encouraged a "cultural mosaic."

Within Quebec, aspirations to be *maîtres chez nous* have grown to become significant desires for sovereignty from the ROC (Rest of Canada). Meanwhile, the strong multicultural reality of the ROC has eroded sensitivities to the distinctly Québécois aspirations. Furthermore, Canadian geographic and demographic realities sustain regional differences.

Underlying all this is the reality of a troubled history of relationships with Canada's aboriginal peoples. One expression of the realities of aboriginal life in Canada is that those aged 65 or older comprise 3.5 percent of the aborigi-

nal population, compared to 12.3 percent in the general population. Also, 36 percent of the aboriginal population is under 15 years of age, versus 20.4 percent in the general population. Issues of education, employment, social services, and healthcare are critical for aboriginal people, along with issues of land claims and self-government. With the establishment of the new Territory of Nunavut in April 1999, this huge northern land with 26,000 people and four official languages becomes Canada's first embodiment of aboriginal self-government on the national scene.

Most of the population of Canada lies within a 300 km band stretching for a distance comparable to that of England to the Persian Gulf. Immigration patterns have changed dramatically, decreasing from more than 90 percent European before 1961 to 19 percent since 1991, and from only 3 percent Asian before 1961 to 57 percent since 1991. The cumulative impact has been more significant in some provinces than others. Where the overall Canadian population in 1996 is over 6 percent Asian, it is over 13 percent in British Columbia and over 9 percent in Ontario. Significantly, with recent patterns of immigration and internal migration, visible minorities are concentrated overwhelmingly in Canada's major cities, especially Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal, and Ottawa.

With respect to religion, Canadians are private. In Canadian politics, "faith may be a motivating principle behind public actions, but would not call for a distinctively Christian coalition to take over Parliament Hill."¹ Faith is more institutional than personal, reflecting the realities of diocese and parish that characterize the dominant early churches (Roman Catholic and Anglican). Canadian religious groups tend to serve their respective affiliates with minimal fanfare.

Canada has different dominant religious groups than the USA. Mainline denominations in Canada comprise 85 percent of the Christian community and conservative Protestants are about 8 percent of the Canadian church scene, compared to 60 percent and 35 percent, respectively, in the USA. In Canada, Lutherans represent 2.4 percent of the population and Anglicans 8.1 percent.

The Canadian census, which regularly gathers information on religious affiliation, reports that the number of people who claim no religious affiliation has almost doubled from 1981 to 1991, increasing from 7.4 percent to 12.5 percent of the total population. The number who report Lutheran affiliation is generally twice the number of people included in the membership of the Lutheran churches in Canada.

Reginald W. Bibby reports² to no one's surprise that religion no longer occupies center stage in Canadian society, and that it has ceased to be life-inform-

¹ Donald C. Posterski and Irwin Baker, *Where's a Good Church?* (Winfield, BC: Wood Lake Books, 1993).

² In Reginald W. Bibby, *Fragmented Gods: the Poverty and Potential of Religion in Canada* (Toronto: Irwin Publishing, 1988).

ing at the level of the average Canadian. He concluded that Canadians have moved from religious commitment to religious consumption. He also says³ that religious participation in Canada is down sharply from the 60 percent of members who attended church weekly in 1945, to 50 percent in 1960, 30 percent in 1980, and 23 percent in 1995. He projects that this will decrease to 15 percent by 2015 and will be even worse for mainline denominations.

Bibby's research and analysis produced other interesting findings. Few people are actively leaving; they still identify with religion. Religion *à la carte* is rampant. Religion continues to be relational (in other words, through family and generational links). Religious memory is everywhere. Receptivity to spirituality is extensive (mystery and the search for meaning). Most people are not looking for churches or religion. Most churches are looking for people (waiting for people to come to them, yet oblivious to strangers who may be present).

Bibby identifies culture as part of the problem, particularly its inclination to adopt a belief here and a practice there, and its desire for religion to speak to some areas but not others. Selective consumption, pluralism, individualism, and relativism mean that people do not really come but also do not really leave, they do not participate in church life regularly but they resurface for baptisms, confirmations, weddings, and funerals.⁴ His principle for hope is that culture defines the environment but does not dictate the outcome.

In distinctly market terminology, Bibby encourages churches to focus on four sets of issues:

- *Structural issues*: Improve church-to-congregation relationships; beware of internal issues.
- *Product issues*: Focus on the three core themes of God, self, and society.
- *Promotion issues*: Identify your market segments; what goes on inside the building?
- *Distribution issues*: Risk moving beyond the safety of sanctuaries.

With respect to ecumenical relations, the Canadian churches have a strong history of ecumenical initiative and cooperation, reflecting the dominance of mainline churches on the Canadian church scene. In recent years, a strong Evangelical Fellowship of Canada has emerged, representing about 2.5 million of Canada's 22 million Christians. Canadian geography and demographics have influenced the development of ecumenical institutions. The Canadian Council of Churches (CCC) has a small staff and program, and regional or provincial councils of churches have not developed. Ecumenical cooperative

³ Cf. Reginald W. Bibby, *There's Got to be More: Connecting Churches and Canadians* (Winfield, BC: Wood Lake Books, 1995).

⁴ See Reginald Wayne Bibby, *Mosaic Madness* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1990).

efforts are carried out by an assortment of ecumenical coalitions affiliated with the CCC.

Significant ecumenical endeavor has been at the local level, especially in rural areas where a clergy person may not have a similar denominational clergy colleague within 150 kms. With decreasing rural populations, and the fact that two thirds of Canadian congregations have fewer than 175 people in Sunday worship (and half of these with fewer than 75 people), ecumenical cooperation is increasing in small communities. The momentum for ecumenical cooperation and formal agreements of closer communion is definitely coming from the grassroots.

"The Sunrise East of Labrador"

"The Sunrise East of Labrador" is the title and first line of a hymn written by Pastor Barry Bence for the constituting convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) in 1985. It aptly reflects the desire of Lutherans in Canada to become an indigenous, autonomous church to serve the unique society and people of Canada.

The first service of Lutheran worship in North America took place in 1619 near Churchill, Hudson Bay. It was led by Danish Pastor Rasmus Jensen who accompanied an ill-fated expedition seeking a Northwest passage. Early German Lutheran settlement in Nova Scotia began over 250 years ago, and several congregations in those early years became Anglican. Immigration from German-speaking countries and Scandinavia provided the basis for Lutheran communities and churches.

To find pastors and to serve communities, relationships developed among various Lutheran synods and councils on a North American basis. Thus in the mid-1960s, the American Lutheran Church (ALC), the Lutheran Church in America (LCA), and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LC-MS) included most of the Lutheran congregations in Canada as well. Many of the institutional links for Canadian Lutherans were north south rather than across the breadth of Canada.

In 1967, Canada's centennial year, the western congregations of the Canada District of the ALC became autonomous to form the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada (ELCC), with 314 congregations and 85,000 members. In 1968, the 12 eastern congregations joined to make the ELCC a national Canadian Lutheran church. By 1968, the ELCC and the western synods of the LCA-Canada section jointly owned and operated Lutheran Theological Seminary in Saskatoon. Until 1973, it included a chair in theology sponsored by the western districts of LC-MS.

In 1986 the Canada Section of the LCA joined with the ELCC to become the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) with 652 congregations and 210,000 members. This church has two seminaries (LTS in Saskatoon and

Waterloo Lutheran Seminary), plus two colleges and two high schools in western Canada. There are five synods with memberships in 1998 as follows: British Columbia Synod 16,408; Synod of Alberta and the Territories 43,458; Saskatchewan Synod 38,449; Manitoba/Northwestern Ontario Synod 22,917; and Eastern Synod 75,895. The Eastern Synod comprises 40 percent of ELCIC membership. The ELCIC is a member of the Lutheran World Federation, the World Council of Churches, and the Canadian Council of Churches.

Since 1986, church membership has decreased to 196,165 members (1997) and 650 congregations. New ethnic congregations consist of 10 Chinese congregations and one mission, totaling 1,225 members; and one Vietnamese mission. Several ethnic congregations still continue with services in German, Finnish, Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian.

The national church organization in 1986 was modeled on churches in the USA. There were six divisions and three offices—sufficient to manage a church of several million members, but insufficient financial resources to fill every executive director position. A major financial campaign, Forward in Mission, enabled many ministries to be funded in the early years. Financial support from synods to the national church decreased continuously.

In 1995, the church convention took bold action to eliminate the structure of divisions and offices, and to replace it with more flexible organization of staff and working groups involving synodical representation. Responsibilities for new mission in Canada were transferred from the national church to synods, and new supporting funds were generated by committing the future earnings on church extension capital funds. A Future Directions Task Force on Mission was commissioned to consult broadly within the church and to bring recommendations to the National Church Council for consideration by the church.

The 1997 convention received the Task Force report with recommendations, and embraced the *Evangelical Declaration* “as our church’s vision for life and mission for the next decade (1997-2007), and as a source and guide for goals, objectives, and strategies to propel us into the next millennium.” This was not merely a structured exercise to produce a document and statement for consideration by a convention. It was an intentional effort to change the way the ELCIC thinks about and does mission.

The declaration begins:

God calls us, through Word and Sacrament, to be disciples and to make disciples. Our discipleship is defined by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Our mission is to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with people in Canada and around the world through the proclamation of the Word, the celebration of the Sacraments, and through service in Christ’s name.

Six statements—each beginning “We believe, teach, and confess”—present the theology of the cross. They conclude with these sentences: “We under-

stand that the present reality of the world involves significant changes in our society, economy and culture" and "We believe that the reality of Christ is that God promises to be with us unconditionally in the midst of the changes in our world."

The church's commitment begins boldly: "Where we see need, we will take action. We will use our gifts deliberately to be the people of God for others." It concludes with statements that, over the next decade, the ELCIC will be involved in mission ("We commit ourselves as church") by focusing on commitments of worship, discernment, equipping for mission, encouraging companionship and advocacy, sharing gifts, communicating clearly, and responding faithfully, promptly, and flexibly.

It is important to note two of the commitments in full:

We commit ourselves as church through prayer, study, and conversation, to discern what it is for us to live faithfully under the cross in this time and place, seeing the world through the event of the cross. We will enter into the lives of people in our local, national and global communities.

We commit ourselves as church to communicate clearly with one another and with society. We commit ourselves to openness and trust. We will listen to the voices of our church and society, and respond to their needs.

These commitments express an awareness that a new era of discernment and a new style of communication are needed—if the church is to be faithful in God's mission. The fleshing out of this awareness and these commitments in practical ways is just beginning. For example, the 1997 and 1999 conventions included discipleship visits to many contexts of Lutheran, ecumenical and secular mission. Resources have been developed to assist congregations to focus on "Being Disciples and Making Disciples" in pursuit of the mission goals of the Evangelical Declaration.

As part of the discernment process, the National Church Council began an initiative in 1998 to open up dialogue with people within the gay and lesbian community, many of whom have Lutheran affiliations. The council has developed a model for "Caring Conversations" for its own use and to guide congregations in beginning to meet and dialogue with people who have in the past been systematically and explicitly excluded from our communities. The model includes conversation, prayer, life-story telling, and Bible study.

In the area of financial resources for mission, the costs of church administration on a *per capita* basis are very high because the ELCIC is a small church in a vast land. Canada is a rich country and ranks number one on the United Nations Human Development Index, yet the standard of living has been decreasing relative to the United States. The North American economic recovery of the past few years, and the resulting growth in financial support to churches, has been sharply less in Canada than in the United States. As a

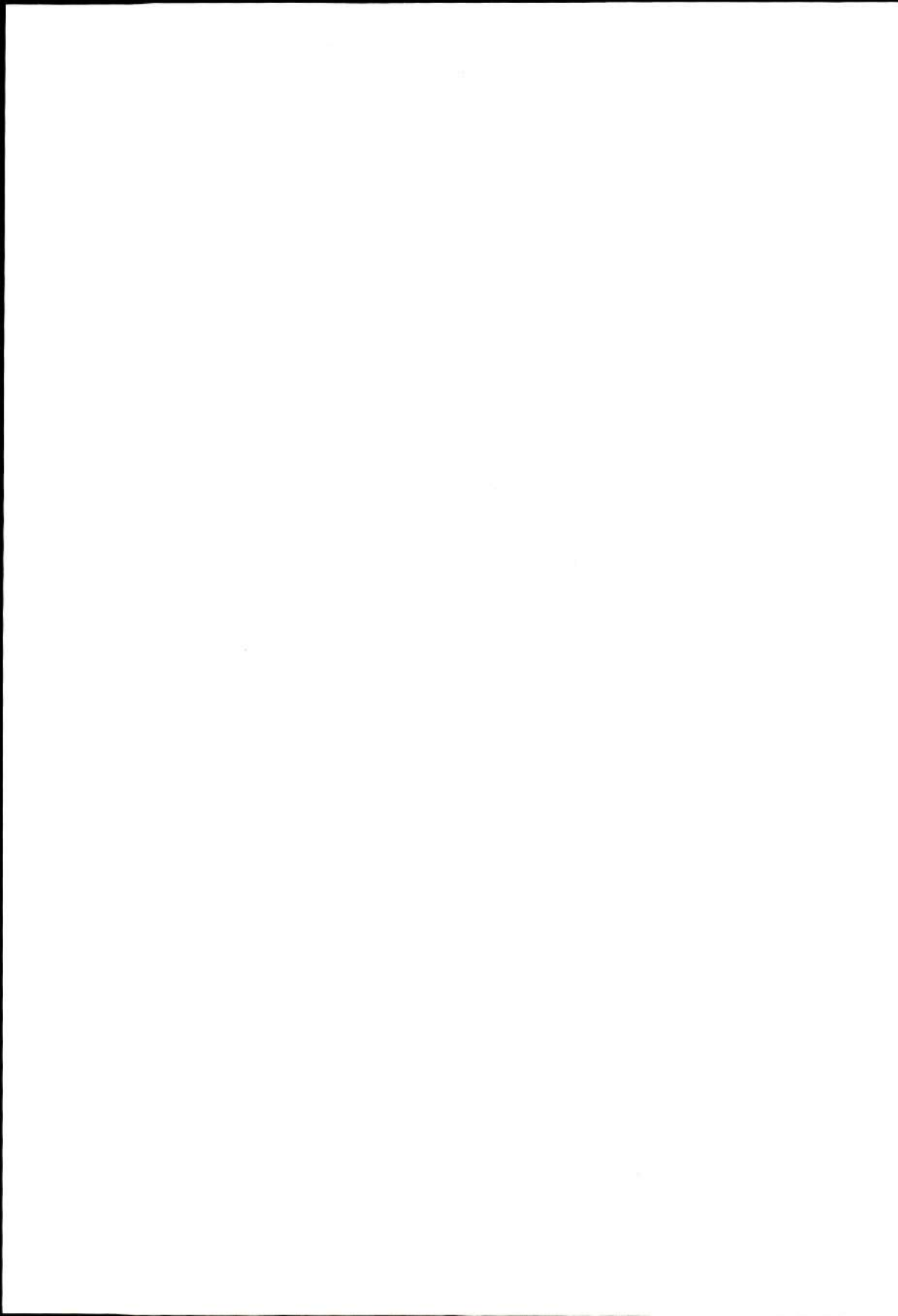
result, the ELCIC feels very constrained in mission because of insufficient financial support through synods from congregations and church members.

Nonetheless, the ELCIC has found creative ways to act in mission. For example, self-examination related to the Jubilee 2000 Campaign has resulted in cancellation of debt owed to the national church by congregations suffering under enormous debt.

In conclusion, I quote again from Canadian music to reflect something of the context of the Canadian culture and church. In 1984, musicians in different national contexts came together to be catalysts for public attention and response to the devastating famine in Ethiopia. The Canadian song, "Tears are not Enough," reflected Canada's private faith (both religious and national) and Canada's sense of world participation rather than world leadership.

I believe that it is more than coincidence that Canada's popular culture responds to the tragedy of enormous famine by expressing "tears are not enough," while the ELCIC in its Evangelical Declaration returns to the theology of the cross to find its grounding for mission in the realities of life and faith. It is no coincidence that this Canadian church finds hope and seeks direction in discernment in the shadow of the cross.

In Canada, as elsewhere, church and culture are intimately related and help to shape each other in the lives of people, institutions, and communities. In many ways, they are partners in seeking direction for life in community.



God's Presence in the Community: The Social Ministry

Joanne Negstad

In American Lutheranism no arena demonstrates God's presence in the community more clearly than its social ministry system.

Through affiliation with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LC-MS), social ministry organizations bring hope and healing to 3,200 communities in all 50 states (plus the Virgin Islands). We work through a wide variety of services available to children, families, the elderly, and communities. In one year, more than \$3.6 billion is spent in such ministry. Nearly a quarter of a million persons are engaged as volunteers, governing boards, or paid staff to bring Christ's mission to reality among hurting, vulnerable people.

The Social Issues We Face

The social issues of our day are best demonstrated by the stories of persons whose lives have been touched through the Lutheran social ministry system.

Changing families

- Emergency shelter and counseling services
"She bore the bruises of abuse when she and her two toddlers entered the shelter, but at last she had found hope and was willing to make the commitment to the hard work necessary to lift herself out of a life of misery."
- Adoption services
"It is true—a medical certainty—that they could not produce biological offspring. It is just as true—a moral certainty—that they are terrific parents to their two adopted children, one from Russia and the other from China."
- Pregnancy services
"Her newborn daughter is pure! As the 16-year-old mother gazes at her sweet sleeping infant, she resolves that, with the help of the Lutheran Social Services (LSS) staff, she will finish school and learn to become a good parent."

Vulnerable children

- Therapeutic foster care
"One of the many behaviors by which a 5-year-old expressed his anger and pain was grinding his teeth at night so badly that he had to wear a special

device. After 18 months of hard work, strong support, and unlimited affection, he began to sleep soundlessly as a 5-year-old should! Parents had reached out and the child had responded!"

"The teenage boys at the residential program have rarely lived in harmony with anyone and yet harmony is precisely what they long for. In this home at LSS they are beginning to find it."

Older persons living longer

- Senior housing and healthcare

"Sisters, aged 90 and 86, live on the Lutheran Home campus. One needs skilled nursing care, the other has independence in her apartment. Saints of the church, they regularly attend the communion services at the home, and visit each other daily."

"It is honorable to be an elder member of society. Even when a person such as a 90-year-old retired professor requires round-the-clock nursing care at the Lutheran Home, he is treated with the respect and deference he and his fellow residents deserve."

- Chaplaincy services

"Each time our nursing homes chaplains give the sacrament to a resident, they offer renewed freedom from slavery. The sacrament is so powerful that it reaches across the bondage of infirmity, loss of memory and confusion which accompany old age."

Other community services

- Refugee services

"The Albanian Kosovar refugee family now resettling in the U.S. may find it difficult to 'bless' the Serbs who became their persecutors, but they are beginning to put their long nightmare behind them."

"She pleased her ESL teacher by reciting her entire grocery list in musically accented but perfect English. She pleases herself most of all. This new life in this new country might just be 'do-able' after all!"

- Disabilities services

"It is commendable that she waters the flowers along the front walk which leads up to the LSS residence where she lives. Institutionalized for most of her adult life, she experiences a joy in this new responsibility which is as rewarding as the praise she receives."

- Addiction counseling, emergency services, AIDS ministry, disaster response services

All bring the message of hope to persons and communities in distress. The church at work!

The Social Ministry System We've Created

The dynamics of the Lutheran social ministry system are changing rapidly! Lutheran social ministry organizations began nearly 150 years ago typically with the concern of congregation members regarding the care of orphans or elderly people in the community. Truly, Lutheran social ministry is rooted in congregational life. Over the years such ministries grew and engaged the support and ownership of synods and districts of the church, though most remain corporately owned by congregations.

Nearly 40 years ago government funding became available to our social ministry organizations. Partnerships were established for them to offer services in the community on behalf of the public. One result, however, was creating distance between the church and the work of social ministry organizations.

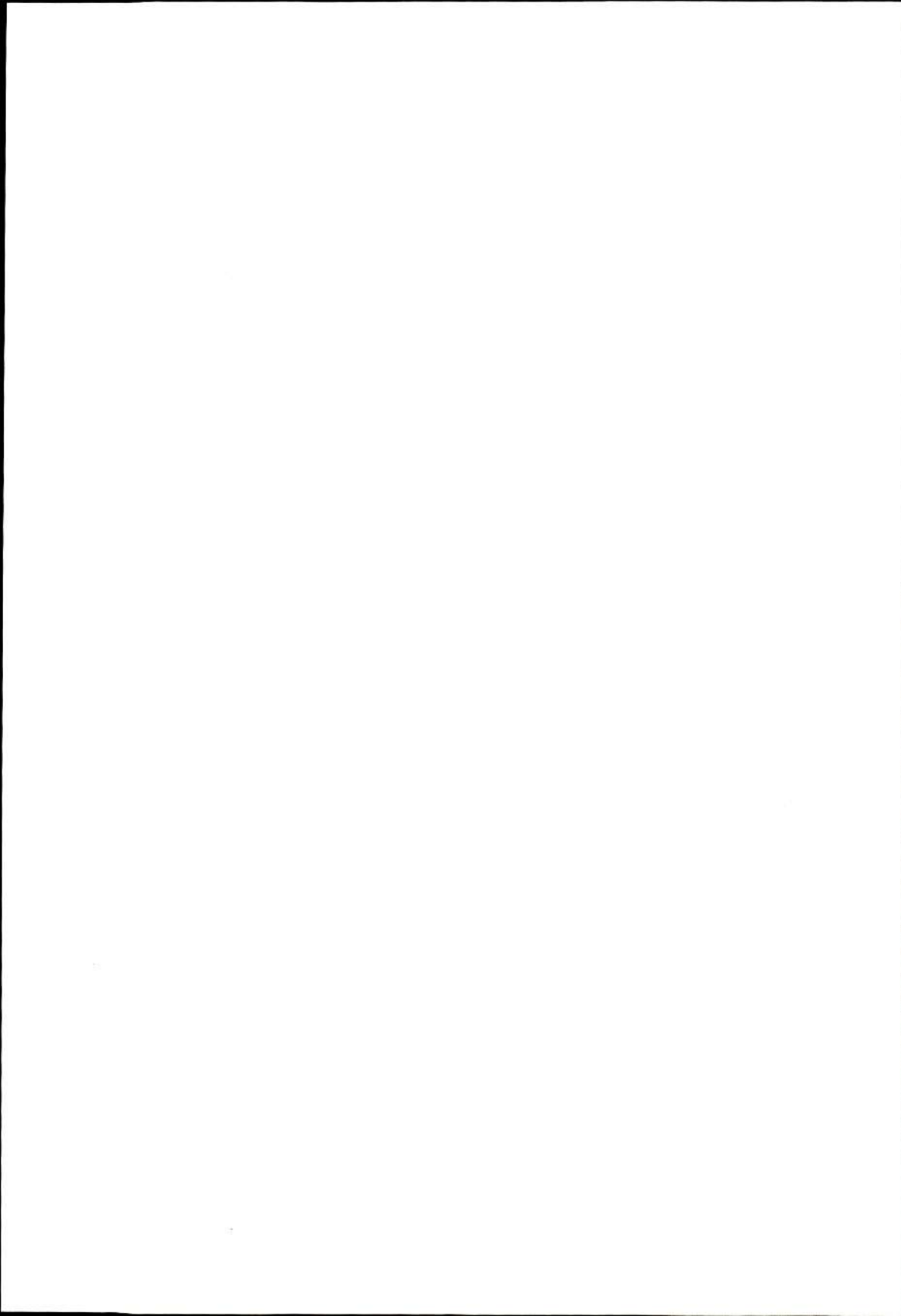
Government funding changed dramatically in the 1990s. Through welfare reform, devolution of government funds, and healthcare reform, partnerships began re-establishing new opportunities.

One of those opportunities has been to create a much more connected system among Lutheran social ministry. Thus, Lutheran Services in America was born in 1997 as an alliance between the ELCA, the LC-MS, and their affiliated or recognized social ministry organizations.

The work of Lutheran Services in America revolves around five mission policies or desired outcomes. They reflect the dynamics of the changing environment and the challenge to this work of the church:

- *Valued Identity*: Being Lutheran in social ministry is identifiable, valued, and supported by social ministry organizations, church bodies, and communities.
- *Integrated System*: The Lutheran social ministry system of services is strengthened, enhanced, and better organized.
- *Strengthened Services*: Lutheran social ministry organizations have the ability to thrive and serve.
- *Unified Voice*: Lutheran social ministry organizations have an effective voice for service and justice to church, to government and to society.
- *Nurture Partnerships*: ELCA and LC-MS (including churchwide, districts/synods and congregations) utilize and embrace social ministry organizations for service and witness.

Social ministry, we believe, is integral to the mission of the church. Together with Word and sacrament, ministry is clear evidence of our response to God's call to serve our neighbor in need.



Facing Social Challenges in the Latino Context

Pablo B. Espinoza

Latin America's present reality and its challenges cannot be properly evaluated without taking a look at its historic context. In doing so, we find an extremely complicated picture. It's like that of a patient in the emergency room with severe complications affecting several organs. Different specialists are needed in order to ensure an appropriate diagnosis and treatment. Octavio Paz would "diagnose" it *El Laberinto de la Soledad* (The labyrinth of solitude). In order to administer the right treatment and bring the patient back to health, we not only need to prescribe emergency medicines, but also to investigate what in the past has caused the illness. This analogy has no other purpose than to start my address by making it clear that Latin America is sick, and that it is its reality from which any critique and analysis ought to be made. The mind-boggling changes in our modern and postmodern age, come at a time when we are still struggling to solve old problems. This drives us to into a vortex from which only more poverty and desolation for our peoples evolve.

The challenges the Latin American church must face are no different from the ones that other institutions face. Our church community is, in a sense, the result of historical events that took place through the centuries and we have not yet completely recovered from the trauma of the European conquest. Ignoring this reality would be like trying to treat a discharging ulcer with a band aid.

As we talk about "communion and community," we should not forget that millions in our Latin community cannot live with dignity, that many children do not get the necessary nourishment, that women are victims of "machismo," that our teenagers see little or no hope and alternatives in their future, and that many professionals do not have a chance to practice their profession. A society where children and old people need to work to support themselves, and adults find no employment is a sick society. This is the main reason why they risk migrating North, sometimes illegally, in the hope of finding a more dignified life or, at the very least, a way to survive. This is the kind of people that make up our churches.

They feel that for years they have been deceived, lied to, and robbed by their politicians. There is a loss of identity that confuses them, and drives them to abandon their values. Thus they start behaving in ways which have been propagated by the media, and which our vulnerable young people feel tempted to imitate. The result is that our youth begins to "need" things that

are not answers to their real, vital needs. That's the reason why thousands upon thousands try to migrate to first-world countries, particularly the USA. On arriving in the U.S. they not only cannot solve their financial problems, but, in addition, they face others: discrimination and racism. Both these result in a segregated community that is struggling to keep its identity and to obtain a few rights. As a result, their situation now is as hard and critical as it was in their countries of origin. The next generations feel the lack of identity and soon learn, on a daily basis, that while they are in North America, where they have been born, the system constantly makes them feel like foreigners.

The struggle to accommodate to this new reality is long and painful for most, especially for those who had no access to education in their countries of origin. They are the ones who have to do the hard farm work, or factory work where, due to their illegal status, they are often abused. They work six days a week, sometimes seven; they have little time left to be with the family; they go back to their houses tired; they lack the strength, or maybe even the ability to help their children out with their homework. Sunday is the only day some mothers have left to do the household chores, so they do not even have the time to go to church. As a consequence, their faith experience means doing the traditional thing: going to church only in special occasions: one them is Ash Wednesday, where the traditional idea is one more of guilt than liberation.

It is in this context that I see, as Lutherans, an opportunity to give this Latin society an alternative type of faith experience. Lutheranism is and ought to be a faith alternative, which should have and keep its reformed shades clearly marked, because this is where its identity comes from. We should preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, a message of grace, forgiveness, and liberation. We should speak up against social and religious injustice. We should open up the luminous pages of the Scripture in order to shake off any type of ignorance and superstition, which for centuries have enslaved our peoples. We should deface the present-day Pharisees and Sadducees, who have abused our people to keep a *status quo* of injustice and oppression.

I make these suggestions not as a theologian, nor academic exegete, but as a living witness of the reality of my people, both in Latin America as well as in North America. My vantage point maybe comes from a perspective different to that of the majority. Many Lutherans are "cradle Lutherans," baptized as Lutheran, cultural Lutherans, in a sense, traditional Lutherans. They see things inside out when it comes to other faith experiences and the Lutheran confessions. I have been a Lutheran for only eight years. I decided to become a Lutheran. That enables me to look in from the outside. A lot, in Lutheran thought, is new to me. To me Lutheranism is a nonsectarian option, but one with clear differences regarding other experiences of faith. Luther's prophetic spirit and his overwhelming, reforming enthusiasm are current, valid, and applicable today, precisely because they were inspired by the liberating strength of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We should strive to come closer to other Christian confessions, with passion and care. By not doing it we run the risk of diluting Christ's message and achieving the radical change our community needs. Our growing but sometimes shaky Latin community needs alternatives that have a clear and concrete identity. We should be inclusive in our communion with other Christian confessions, and we should try to work together for God's kingdom. Our identity should never be diluted into a pluralist appearance, lukewarm and colorless. Our pulpits should be generous when preaching God's love in Jesus Christ. The Lord's table should be offered to everyone who wants to come, take, eat, and drink. However, this should not mean that others will not be able clearly to distinguish what we are and what we believe. Nor, that we should not go with joy and enthusiasm to other non-Lutheran churches, to demonstrate with respect and sincerity our ecumenical convictions, to foretaste with other brothers and sisters in Christ the feast to come.

Let us build a church that can be identified by its transcendental values; a community that can distinguish who we are, where we are going, what we believe; a church that is an alternative of faith for people, that seeks security and strength. Reformation is and must be an ongoing process with clear and stable patterns. Jesus of Nazareth is our example: he respected constructive traditions while breaking with those he deemed useless, and denounced those that were kept to manipulate people's conscience. Let us be faithful to our Christian vocation and to our Reformation heritage for the glory of God and the good of humankind.

The Church and Racism

Albert Pero, Jr.

We need to remember that the perennial struggle of the people of color within a society, whose controlling motif is economic and racial power, results in contradictory ways of interaction within the society. A delineation of the areas of experience where pressures are most severe will provide a background for dealing with a necessary clarification of our communion.

As we remember who we are, what our relationship is to all of life and the mission, we are to do so in harmony with the cosmos. We must leap beyond oppressive churches. This we must do in order to return to the ecumenical table, the fellowship in the body of Christ, with a more authentic sharing of the gifts which God has dispersed upon all for the edification of the body of Christ, to the glory of God.

Why do you seek further beatings? Why do you continue to rebel? The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but bruises and sores and bleeding wounds; they have not been drained, or bound up, or softened with oil. (Is 1:5-6)

The mark of racism is deep in the psyche of every American person. I say every American person because every person in America is to a great extent what she or he is because of racism in this country. What white people tried to do to the slave as well as what the slave did to the white person has resulted in an important key to understanding the church in America. And the church that sees itself as a healing community has to take note.

It was slavery and the slave trade that provided the initial thrust to the American economy. It was slavery that built Monticello, Mount Vernon, Boston, Charleston, New Orleans. Slavery shaped and molded the fundamental compromises of the United States constitution. It shaped and molded the westward movement of the nation in the Civil War period. In sum, the institution of slavery was a major formative influence in the development of America.

The inhumanities of slavery, the wholesale myths perpetrated so that it could flourish as an institution, and the guilt and rage resulting from both, have left ugly crippling scars on Americans. Consequently, it is nearly impossible for either white or black to understand or reach out to persons in America without a prior understanding of the institution of slavery.

The experience of white America has been an experience characterized by inhumanity to humanity. The widespread abuse in the institution of slavery has been followed by violence (presumably unintended) of white segregation

based on assumptions of white superiority, human exploitation, and the selfish devouring of the earth's resources. It is a history of wars of conquest punctuating the development of the country from East to West, of the dubious use of technology to reduce humanity to a thing, and of racism as a continuing national institution—more sophisticated than before, but as hard-nosed and obstinate as ever.

The virtual extermination of the American Indian, the exclusion of Chinese, the internment of Japanese, and the growing persecution of Chicanos are all brutalities which, along with the more notorious institution of slavery, point to a basic inability on the part of white America to recognize persons of color as human beings. The frequent recurrence of the exploitation of people of color in the history of our country and the blessing often accorded to it by white churchly America suggests that whiteness embodies (to an alarming degree) a truncated appreciation of the essence of humanity.

How can this be? Whether prompted by lust for power or by propaganda, by expedience or self-interest, the depreciation of the humanity of persons of color is so much a part of our history that we have to say either that whiteness is some sort of sickness or that the white person has been the victim of a long systematic program. It seems incredible that reasonable, moral, and God-fearing people from Europe (for the most part) would be able to live with the institution of slavery or with the dehumanization of others.

In American society, to get people to perceive inhumanity as normal must have required a full-blown rationalization of what, obviously, was contrary to God's will. People of color had to be shown as less than human, as caricatures of humanity. Whites, on the other hand, had to be shown as being superior in dignity, intelligence, capability, and (of all things) morality. The supposed inferiority of the person of color could be credible only where the superiority of the white person was made credible and vice versa.

So the cultivation of a whole set of stereotypes was basic to a foolproof system of rationalization and justification for treating whole segments of the population as less than human. It is a matter of record that this legitimization of the illegitimate even included bogus theological support on the part of some white churches.

The extent to which white Americans have been able to accept and live with an understanding based on a construct of lies is bad enough in itself. Since lies are always in danger of being found out, the white American had to develop a whole system of defenses to maintain the credibility and the functionality of that lie. White church folk who claimed to be the people of God and claimed to put their faith in Jesus were forced more and more to depend on myths about their own superiority for their continued sense of well-being.

H. Richard Niebuhr defines faith as "trust in that which gives value to the self," and "loyalty to what the self values." Insofar as the white American came to depend rather desperately on a whole system of defenses, racism appears

to be a sort of faith; if it is a type of faith, it is also a form of idolatry, for it elevates a human factor to the level of the ultimate.

Martin Luther once posed the question, "What does it mean to have a god?" His answer was, in effect, "Whatever then your heart clings to and relies upon, this is properly your god." Superiority or supremacy of their race becomes the fundamental assumption upon which racists organize their private life, their public institutions and public policy, and even their religious responses. The defense of racist assumptions requires making race a constant, and possibly a final point of reference for every decision and action.

Kelsey, in his book, *Racism and the Christian Understanding of Man*, says that when the racist is also a Christian, which is often the case in America, he is frequently a polytheist. Historically, in polytheistic faith, various gods have controlled various spheres of authority. Thus a "Christian" racist may think he or she is living under the requirements of the God of biblical faith in most areas of life. Whenever matters of race impinge on his or her life, in every area so affected, the idol of race determines attitude, decision, and action.

It is therefore of questionable authenticity when and if white America (and especially the white church in America) raises the question of a universal humanity. This is a devastating charge for the white church institution that sees itself as God's healing arm. It says that when white churches stand in the posture of God's chosen people and proclaim healing for the nations, that the poor, the powerless, and the second rated may well retort: "Physician heal thyself." They too have heard the Good News of Jesus declaring these very poor, powerless, and rejected ones to be the true people of God. In America the most obvious and widespread exemplification of who these people are is the black person. So what about the black people: how has this American malignancy affected them?

Whenever black people feel spiritually empty or broken and guilty, they too seek refuge in God. They seek affirmation, acceptance, a valid identity as a creature of God, and hope. They may seek the consolation of faith in the black or white Christian church. If they choose the white Christian church, they will still hear that the Lord Jesus is the redeemer of humanity. The problem is that on the one hand they will hear the message of salvation in terms that make that person long for deliverance, yet on the other hand in terms which cast real doubt as to whether or not a black person can be delivered. The whole cast in which the message of God's salvation in Christ comes to them—the rhetoric, the symbolism, and the relationships with those they meet at worship—all suggest that deliverance was foretold by white prophets, recorded by divinely inspired white writers, and continues to be carried to the corners of the globe by white missionaries to the so-called heathen (colored) races. The result is that in predominantly white Christian churches black and other children of color are psychologically and spiri-

tually conditioned to assume that life is a matter of white superiority and black inferiority.

There is little wonder, then, that black America has been caught in a long-standing sickness: internalized oppression. It was constantly injected with a theological and philosophical poison. This was a poison directly and solely responsible for a behavioral schizophrenia—a split personality of the black community. The black American community was ashamed of its heritage, ashamed of its racial identity, and definitely afraid of its future. The entire race was spiritually ill. It was striving desperately to erase its true identity, and attempting to take on a false identity through projecting itself into the social, religious, and cultural ghetto of the white community.

It is not too much to say that white humanity had become the black humanity's symbol of God, certainly of godliness, because only in the white person's world and in the white person's religion could one seemingly find some measure of deliverance.

The cruel irony is that in aspiring to a whitened identity, selfhood was lost. Robbed of self and soul, the black person in particular (possibly other ethnic persons in general) accepted a distorted view of God's deliverance in Jesus and was in real trouble.

Even after the black consciousness movement of the 1960s and 1970s, it is hard to believe that people of color are still struggling to abandon these distorted concepts of self and willingness to know God exclusively in white terms. Today's people of color, through an in-depth awareness of themselves and their environment, have ceased searching for the people of God exclusively within the white community. They have discovered that their own communities might also be where the true people of God, the chosen of God, reside.

The years of pious pronouncements and recent ecumenical dialogues on unity from white churchpersons, promises of a non-segregated church in a non-segregated society, and the pledges of commitment to the black community—all have an aura of play-acting and lip service. Racism and the caste system have always been the 11th commandment of white Christianity to which many whites have responded with very little opposition. What a problem! Is there a solution? Can the sickness be healed? How does one deal with white Christian racism in white Christian institutions?

If the Lord of hosts had not left us a few survivors, we should have been like Sodom, and become like Gomorrah. (Is 1:9)

Healing comes through receiving God's grace by faith and repentance. Within the body of Christ this is expressed in our acceptance of one another as gifts of God for the upbuilding of the body of Christ.

The black church could be a major influence for renewal in the Christian churches in America? Will it allow for organic church union?

The unresolved tensions between Christian cultures within the same denominations force us to question the value of such a union. Clearly, former mergers and organic unions of various types have been based primarily (if not exclusively) on political considerations rather than on theological concerns.

The basic difference today, for example, between black Christians and white Christians is in a theological perspective. Can white churchpersons who have traditionally seen the Christ figure exclusively represented as the Samaritan on the road to Jericho enlarge their theological understanding and self-understanding to the extent that they see the Christ figure also as the man in the ditch? Until they do, and until they dare hear the Lord's command, "Go and do likewise" in terms of identity with the disenfranchised and the oppressed of society, they will have resisted new life and healing as much for themselves as for those whom they seek to help.

The biblical understanding of the church raises very profound and penetrating questions about the nature of white American Christianity. One of the anomalies of our time is that we can speak of a "white racist Christian church." To speak of the oppressiveness of the church is an incongruity.

What a problem this racism has caused for the world today! No wonder people are asking where God can be found within the institutional church. God can be found by remembering, as we are exhorted to do in the words of institution in the Lord's Supper, "Do this in remembrance of me," not remembering the god of racism.

It appears as though white theology had not remembered that we are all brothers and sisters in Christ. It had been too preoccupied with being patriotic by defining theological talk independent of black, yellow, brown, and red suffering, and defining the Christian faith as compatible with white racism. In both cases theology has become a servant of nationalism.

Therefore, God's Word to all of creation in judgment and grace is a necessary component toward an inclusive authentic church. It arises from the need to remember our identity, relationships, and mission from our parent God, who created, redeemed, liberated, and keeps us in the fellowship of faith.

Theology cannot be separated from God's community and cultures. Theology is God's people attempting to define in every generation its reason for being in the world. Identity, relationships, and mission depend on this. The enduring constant, then, on which we can always depend is not the material meanings of dogma such as grace, sin, and so on. Rather the constant is God's community filled with the fruits of the spirit; not the ideas of theology but *koinonia*. God's community is the one thing that cannot be sacrificed. Therefore, we, as the so-called minority (people of color), must begin to analyze our identity, relationships, and mission in terms of that reality in Christ which is diametrically opposed to the reality of some whites concerning our being.

Our identity means belonging to a communion, the fellowship in which God places us through baptism. In this community in Christ, we remember and understand that we belong to God; we remember our past. Black consciousness is an attempt to remember how our foreparents held on and transmitted the faith in Christ that the slave masters tried to destroy but which in reality only tended to confirm it.

Theological / Ecclesiological Models for a Resolution of the Issues

This section of the paper will be the shortest and yet the most enjoyable. We do not have a foolproof model to offer as much as suggesting models for provocative theological discourse among us in order creatively to engage in an experimentation into the truth of God's will for all of creation.

The most important theological rubric to note for the church's approach to economic models is that is a confessional issue. Probably one of the best pieces of research in this area was done by Ulrich Duchrow. Duchrow's material is full of theological models for the church's approach to the global economy today.¹

Duchrow asserts that

Some theologians, therefore, including myself, are seeking, in the light of the New Testament doctrine of the body of Christ, to understand, analyze and influence the international economic processes and mechanisms which experience shows are already catastrophic in their effects and are becoming increasingly so with each passing day, costing every year the lives of roughly thirty million human beings.²

In ecclesiological terms, this means that if the church is the one universal body of Christ, this body of Christ is divided among active thieves, passive profiteers, and deprived victims.

Therefore becoming "models" of God's economy would suggest the following principles for the present, as well as the future, for our churches:

1. A correlation of the doctrine of eschatology with social analysis as suggested in the corpus of the theology of King and Cone.
2. The meditation of one's own cultural tradition with one's denominational heritage.
3. The empowering / facilitating of ethnic leadership.
4. Evangelism that is holistic.
5. Education that is contextual.
6. Ecclesiastical structures that liberate.
7. Developing the validity of Lutheran cultural pluralism.

¹ Ulrich Duchrow, *Global Economy: A Confessional Issue for the Churches?* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1986), p. 162.

² *Ibid.*, p. 47.

The development of these principles should assist Christians in their struggle to become models, witnesses to God's plentifulness rather than humanity's poverty. The church's model should always call for reconciliation but not at the expense of cheap grace (Bonhoeffer) which seems to be our modern effective way or reaching economic solutions and social agreements. This kind of reasonableness is based on an incorrect understanding of God, one which serves the preservation of the *status quo*. The model of the church is that of biblical teaching or reconciliation and forgiveness which makes very clear that nobody can be forgiven and reconciled with God unless she or he repents. Reconciliation and forgiveness is efficacious when the economic oppressors show signs of genuine repentance (the Zaccheus story).

The biblical model of the Zaccheus story helps us to see how the wealthy respond in repentance. Luke 12:22-34 demonstrates a similar model of generosity to the poor. The ordinary functions of possessions—to ensure status and power and invulnerability over against others—all are excluded. Possessions become useful and acceptable within the Christian community exactly insofar as they become dispensable of their possessors, and thus available for dispersal as the material needs of others, or the spiritual needs of their erstwhile owners, make it expedient. Although it is fair to say that in Luke the disposal of wealth is symbolic or symptomatic rather than being the subject of particular regulations, one does well to remember that symptoms are symptoms because they indicate the presence of disease. Only in Luke's Gospel is the blessing of the poor matched by its corresponding denunciation: "Woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation." (Lk 6:24)³

There is no substitute for a good role model and there are innumerable Christians with many possessions who have shared theirs "talents" with the poor. The black church, too, has always known the necessity and the effectiveness of a holistic, or total, approach to its commitment to human salvation. If the Roman environment in which the early church emerged was mean and hostile, then the environment in which the early black church had to struggle was nothing short of catastrophic. It was a slave environment in which there was no freedom, no legal redress, no health protection, no social services to buffer the needs for counseling, child welfare, housing, employment, or financial assistance no matter how desperate the circumstance. Black people did not own anything, not even themselves. Even their spiritual nurture was in the hands of others who put their personal economic interest before any interests of black people, spiritual or otherwise, would be considered.

Slavery was a total way of life. There was no room in it for happenstance. And yet, because there is no need for happenstance where there is faith and enlightened determination, the black church defied the

³ Sondra Ely Wheeler, *Wealth as Peril and Obligation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 72.

hostilities that forbade it to be born, overcame the repression that sought to destroy it, and survived to become the seed-bed and the mother of the African American culture we cherish and struggle to preserve as our heritage.⁴

The African and African-American churches have been chosen as the significant models not as an effort to claim priority for the black Christian tradition, nor is it intended to be a romanticizing of reality. It is, however, an attempt to deal with the matter of contextuality that surrounds the experience of every people. Moreover, it raises for the Lutheran church, as well as other denominations, the challenging question of whether the church will have any room for more than one Christian cultural tradition.

More particularly, is it possible for the victims of racism and economic poverty to be a healing force for the rich and powerful? We would like to answer that question with an illustration from Acts 16:30-31. The Philippian jailer (the oppressor) asks, "What must I do to be saved?" The answer of the apostle Paul (the oppressed) is: "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved; you and your household."

Perhaps there will come a time in the life of the nations and in an expression of the Christian churches, as it was in the life of the jailer, when those who hold the keys of another's release will themselves ask the ultimate of salvation, liberation, freedom, healing, and wholeness. And if that ultimate question is asked in the presence of those who (though only recently out of chains) have not lost their spiritual sensitivity, perhaps a similar reply will be forthcoming: "Believe, not in your two cars, money, tradition, rhetoric, conventions, nor in the compelling forces of your conception as a nation, but in Jesus."

The challenge before us is the challenge to accept the call to be physicians rather than victims. It involves more than first glances are capable of revealing. Our perception of what it means to be free can come only from the true analysis of our conditions of oppression. "How free am I?" is answered by "How much am I prepared to lose?" A perception of what life means can only come in confrontation with death. The oppressed have fewer illusions about themselves. They cannot afford them. They know they are in trouble. A true perception of others and of the world around us is possible in direct proportion to our trouble. A true perception of others and of the world around us is possible in direct proportion to our capacity to see ourselves correctly. Nevertheless, to be so clearly identified with the oppressed poses the temptation neatly to identify our struggle and our context with the coming of the kingdom of God.

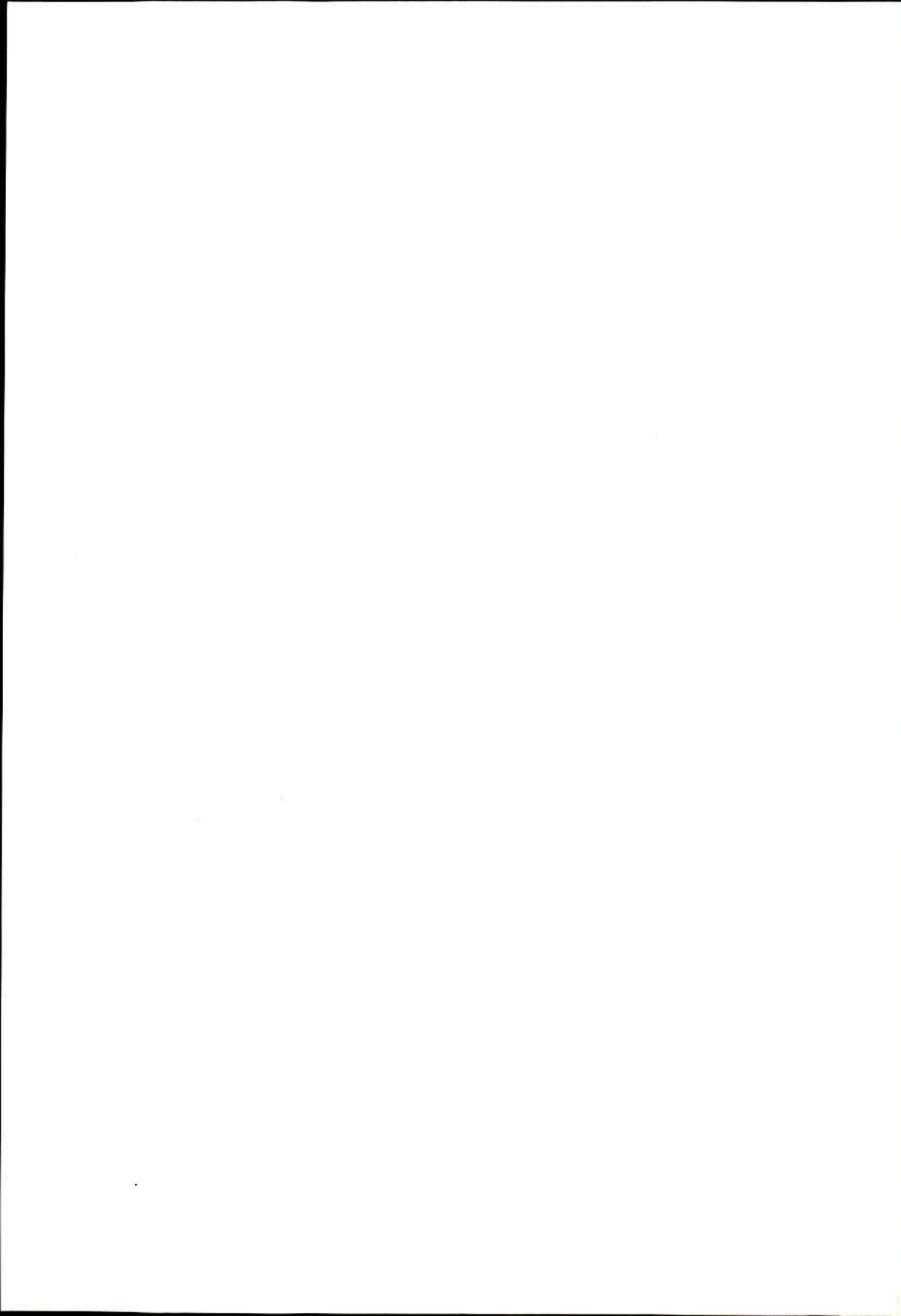
⁴ Gregory S. Reed, *Economic Empowerment through the Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervon, 1994), p. 12.

The oppressors who need illusions about themselves and the world around them must stylize the truth by crassly individualizing it or spiritualizing it, or by moralizing it to justify their status and their oppressive self-serving agendas. Therein lies their own oppression, their own inability to perceive how oppressive they really are and that is their enslavement.

In conclusion, we would like to assert that the statement "The gospel is for all people" has a dismal correlation: that all people are liars. Blind. All consequently need the discipline, the encouragement, the "eyes" of each other in repentance. All need each other to keep judgment straight and unvarnished, and to keep the Good News fresh and free. In short, to keep us all from the most warned against sin in Scripture—idolatry.

We need our Lutheran church to be a family rich in diversity, a community of all persons who commit themselves to exposing untruth, proclaiming the truth, and acting out that truth.

In Christ, time profoundly influences the basic structures we must use to fulfill the Christian mission. This is an awesome responsibility, and an enormous challenge. We stand at the crossroads of the 21st century. To be God's physician or the oppressor's victim will determine the future of our Christian witness, as one holy, catholic and apostolic church.



The Church in Rural America

Sandra La Blanc

The setting for rural ministry is becoming increasingly difficult to find these days due to rapidly changing economic conditions throughout rural America. In addition, communication becomes increasingly difficult as polarization of community occurs because of the changing economic conditions. For example, the small family hog producer is often at great odds with the contract hog producer who also happens to be a member of the same rural church. The language that each uses will be different. And the very real economic threat to the small hog farmer makes hearing the communication from the contract hog farmer difficult at best. In many rural churches, members who are at odds in terms of economics refuse to take communion together—they refuse to be church together. It is the role of church in these instances to provide a place for moral deliberation while recognizing that we are all family as we come to the table of the eucharistic celebration.

The homogeneity experienced for decades in rural America is rapidly changing. One factor is immigrants from all over the world settling in rural areas. Many of these immigrants rely on the land for their livelihood. Welcoming the new immigrant and understanding the changing context of the rural church is a reality we as church must recognize and welcome.

The rural church must fulfill a number of roles: being a pastoral presence, being a leader and a prophet. However, an equally important role of rural church is as leader and as prophet. Communion, communication, and community all are essential to the roles of pastor and prophet.

During the 1980s, the United States lost nearly 600,000 family farmers and ranchers. This crisis was due primarily to a drop in land values coupled with high debt. We are expecting to lose a further 600,000 or more over the next three to five years. Often, the exodus from the land is a silent one where farmers who have farmed the land leave and sell off what they can just to maintain the equity that they have in their farming operation.

The present crisis is due primarily to low prices. Commodity prices across the board are at an all-time low. With every planting of traditional crops or livestock herds, the farmer or rancher is losing money. The average age of farmers in the United States is 59 years and many of them are losing any equity they had toward retirement.

The personal, family, and community crises are reaching epidemic proportions. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) is in the process of organizing events that will collect food for family farmers and ranchers.

Yes, families that are growing our food are in fact going hungry. In addition, clothing drives (especially for winter clothing and snow boots for the children) are taking place. Donations are being sent to provide relief for those affected. Spousal abuse is occurring at exponential rates, as are drug and alcohol abuse. Families are not getting health care because they cannot afford it. (For example, one woman in South Dakota decided that succumbing to breast cancer is an easier way out of the dilemma she and her family are in.) Suicides are happening throughout rural America. These images are not the bucolic Norman Rockwell vision of rural America we might see on television or in the printed media.

The economic issues affecting rural America are very complex. Following are some of the reasons that are causing the current crisis in agriculture in North America. Many of the same issues are relevant throughout the world. (The term multinationals is used but the term transnationals can be used interchangeably.)

1. The continuing loss of family farms results in the concentration of land ownership.
2. Rural communities are rapidly deteriorating.
3. The attitude toward rural life is primarily a result of a lack of proper land-stewardship ethic or an appropriate creation theology.
4. Society abuses the earth's natural resources.
5. Modern industrial agriculture is unsustainable.
6. Agriculture is increasingly being controlled by petrochemical, pharmaceutical, and other industrial corporations.
7. U.S. "cheap food" policy is bankrupting family farm agriculture.
8. We fail to relate Christian faith to economic reality.
9. U.S. governmental farm and food policy needs active church involvement.
10. We fail to recognize the effects of American industrial agriculture on the people of the developing world.

Food is not like other businesses. The essence of life should be available to all. More and more we hear agricultural economists as well as transnational corporations talking about the need for only 20,000 or 30,000 farmers and ranchers to supply commodities to the global food system. The globalization of the food system affects community literally throughout the world. We (the U.S.) expect peasants from around the world to produce commodities for our lifestyle. Community is affected negatively in many ways.

The system is like an hourglass. Commodities produced by thousands of farmers pass through a few large firms to millions of consumers. As a result, the market is no longer competitive and information about the market is no longer accessible.

Agribusiness communicates a message that it is okay to use God's creatures as machines, which is done in factory farming operations. It communicates a

message that when your neighbor goes out of business it is an opportunity for you to expand your business and to make more money.

We in the faith community do not use the same messages of communication. Our language is the Golden Rule and not gold rules. Our community is being destroyed both within and without by the globalization of our food system. Farm families in Middle America are going to bed hungry. And this does not really take into account what we have done to the rest of the world.

The Lutheran Bishops of Minnesota, in a recent statement, said this about farming:

Lutherans understand that farming is a vocation—a calling—and that agriculture is basic to the survival and security of people at home and throughout the world. Agriculture provides the grain for our daily bread as well as producing the rest of our food supply. Without a bountiful and affordable food supply Americans would not enjoy the quality of life we do.

As we pray, "Give us this day our daily bread," what are we saying? Here's what Martin Luther had to say in paragraph one of the Large Catechism on this petition:

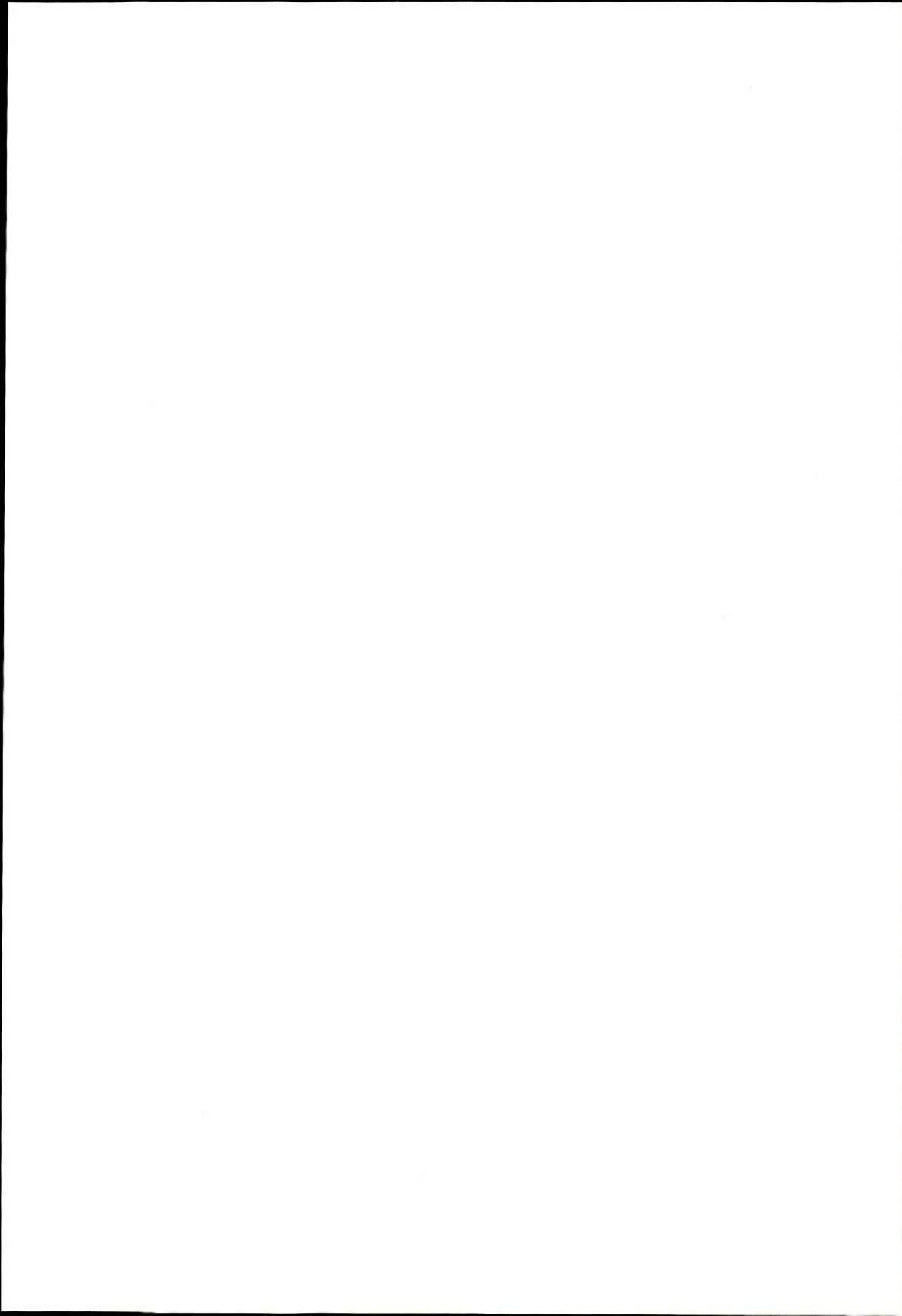
Here we consider the poor bread-basket—the needs of our body and our life on earth. It is a brief and simple word, but very comprehensive. When you pray for "daily bread" you pray for everything that is necessary in order to have and enjoy daily bread and, on the contrary, against everything that interferes with enjoying it. You must therefore enlarge and extend your thoughts to include not only the oven or the flour bin, but also the broad fields and the whole land which produce and provide for us daily bread and all kinds of sustenance. For if God did not cause grain to grow and did not bless and preserve it in the field, we could never take a loaf of bread from the oven to set on the table.¹

And finally, it was for a reason that Jesus chose the earthly elements of bread and wine for our eucharistic celebration. Bread and wine—the essence of our life as Christians—are what at stake when we talk about the globalization for our food system.

As Christians, it is imperative that we know who produces the essence of life, who profits from it, and who has access to it and most importantly, who does not have access to it. Isn't that what we are about as Christians?

So, I end with communion. Literally and figuratively it is communion that we must come to terms with. It's about the essence of life on earth and beyond. It is our faith as Christian Lutherans.

¹ Luther's explanation of the Lord's Prayer in "The Large Catechism," in Theodore G. Tappert (ed.), *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 430.



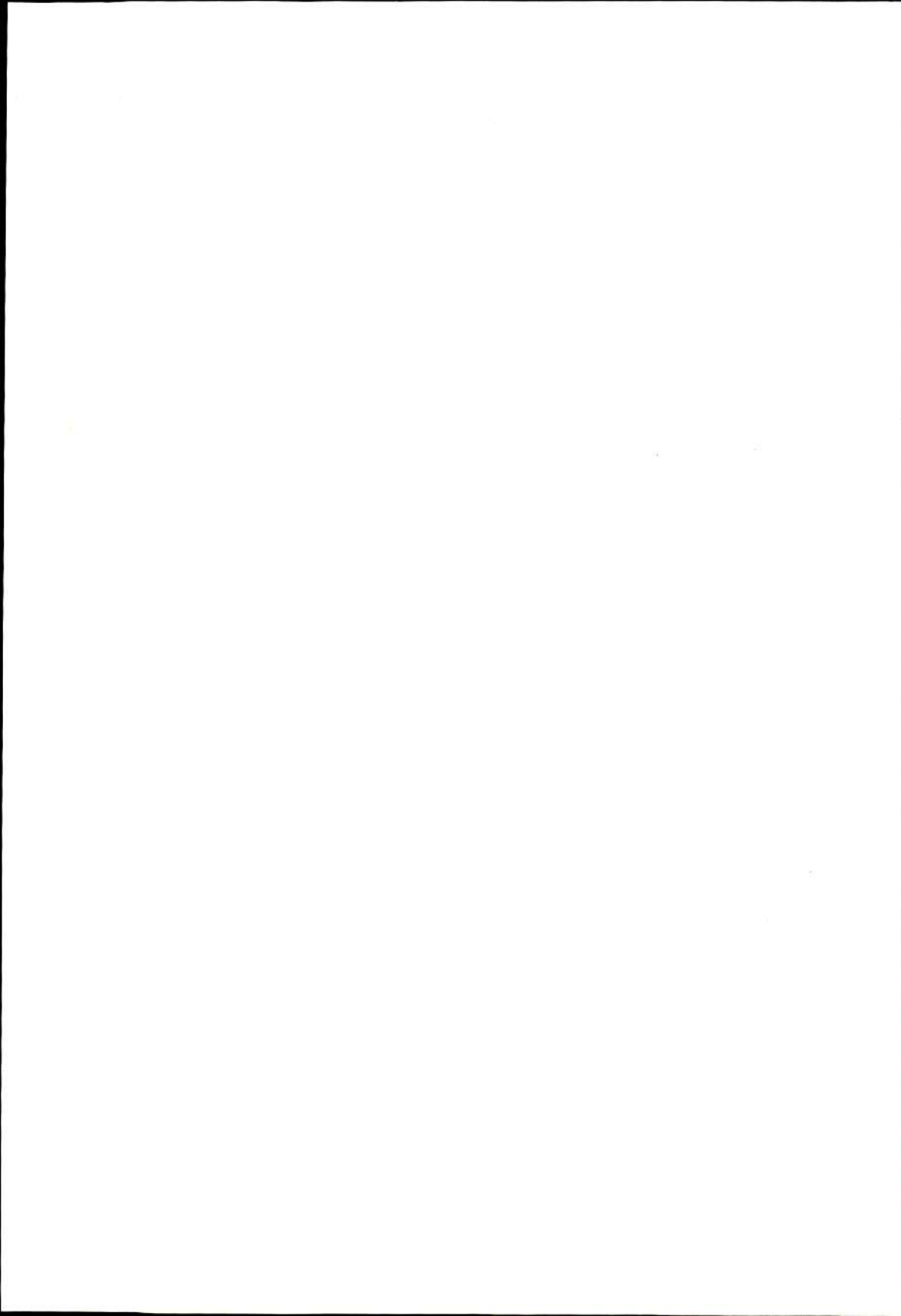
The Rural Church

Ronald Duty

Over 5,000 of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's (ELCA) 11,000 congregations are rural. Most tend to be small "family" churches with membership under 450. The predominant metaphor by which these congregations understand themselves is "family," which is the predominant metaphor by which most Americans understand any expression of humanity larger than the individual. Most of these congregations have living memories of when they were much larger and their congregational lives were much richer.

Social issues in rural America which challenge the churches include the structural changes in agriculture and their significant environmental implications and effects: increasing ethnic diversity; increasing colonization and vertical integration of health care by remote urban organizations; increasingly sophisticated hate groups acting against a variety of non-white people; a range of sexuality issues including homosexuality and abortion; and the increasing presence of HIV/AIDS patients in rural areas.

Social conflicts over these developments have tended to split rural congregations at the same time that it has shown congregations and other expressions of the ELCA largely ill-equipped to respond. It is not uncommon, for growers on either side of the controversy surrounding large-scale hog confinement to refuse to worship or receive communion at the Lord's table together. Many congregations have not managed such conflicts well. Nor have synods or the ELCA responded entirely effectively. Although the ELCA has approved significant social statements on the environment and on issues it is hampered by a limited ability to show a significant number of voters in support of ELCA positions at both the national and state levels, and a complete inability to influence political campaigns through contributions. Until 1999 the Lutheran Office of Governmental Affairs suffered a 4-5 year hiatus in expressly addressing agricultural issues at the federal level because of limited financial support for appropriate staff time.



The Relevance of the Church: Some Keywords

Challenges Facing Every Church in North America¹

- The explosion of new knowledge and technical power.
- The destruction of our ecological system.
- The declining "connective tissue" between people (bowling alone).
- The shift from ascribed to achieved identities (spiritual journey).
- A collision or mixing of cultures (*mestizaje*).
- Restructuring.
- The growing power of the almighty dollar.
- The shift from print to electronic culture.
- The search for clear images of what it means to be human.
- Changing leadership styles.
- The growing confusion about what truly is the Christian treasure.

James Wind

The Church and Popular Culture

- Theologians, clergy and church leaders fear the language, culture, and power of Madison Avenue (advertising), Hollywood (film and television) and Nashville (music).
- Languages clash between literacy, in an academic model, and the language of popular culture which is multi-sensory (visual/aural/tactile).
- Images and sounds are key components of emotional memory.
- Lutherans are part of an earlier communication revolution from five hundred years ago where Gutenberg (movable type), *lingua franca* (German), and cultural adaptation of music, were key components. We are stuck there. As Lutherans adopt the technologies of today, we do not critically examine the cultural context and ask Martin Luther's "What does this mean?"
- In seminaries we teach ancient languages (Hebrew and Greek) and ancient cultures. For international services we teach French, Hindi, Japanese, Swahili, and others. We do not teach the languages of this North American culture (visual, aural, kinesthetic, emotional, and social).
- Our culture is our second largest U.S. export.

¹ These keywords were discussed with Dr. Wind during a teleconference at the beginning of the North American regional consultation.

- We speak as a culture (U.S.) but we do not listen (globally).
- ELCA investment practices do not acknowledge the power of the engines of culture. This is unlike African investment policies which had a direct impact on the downfall of apartheid.
- Media industries are merging and becoming even more influential transnational powers. These cultural engines make decisions based on the bottom line rather than the common good.
- Advertisers understand sin. They know a broken life. They play on it.
- Advertising influences behavior, otherwise there would not be the capital investment in this industry.

John Lynner Peterson

Six Characteristics for the Future Church

- That the church will be representative of the diverse population of the United States.
- That the church will work effectively with ecumenical partners.
- That the church will be noted for its solidarity with the poor.
- That members will connect their faith with their daily life.
- That congregations will see themselves as mission centers.
- That its leaders will focus on helping members to use their talents for ministry.

H. George Anderson

The "Charism" of Gifts

When we begin to see the "charism" of gifts people have to offer us in our congregational, community and social settings, I believe that certain things will emerge :

- The parish will be seen as a whole community not just the clientele within it.
- Pastoral ministry is understood not as a solo career but the collective ministries of a community.
- Authority and power are used to empower and protect others within the community. When acquired they are given away.
- Theology is seen not as a theory (doctrine) to prove its validity, but the experience of the people seeking to interpret the message of the gospel in light of faith and their own society.
- The institution becomes organization and committees become communities.

Steve Robertson

The Lutheran Church in North America: A Community on the March

Monica J. Melanchthon

Life in North America at the turn of the century is filled with both peril and promise. It is a time of unprecedented economic growth and prosperity. And yet the gap between the rich and the poor continues to widen. The struggle to make ends meet and the accompanying stress of such a lifestyle is having repercussions on health and family living as well as on social, religious, and moral development. Widespread violence, especially in schools and the workplace, continues to plague the region. Fast-changing demographic shifts, particularly the increase of people of Hispanic origin and Asians, are having a profound impact on North American culture and norms. Racial tensions and hate crimes continue to make headlines. Women and minorities, despite significant gains, continue to hit the "glass ceiling." The top leadership in business, government, the military, and the church continues to be predominantly white and male.

A certain degree of cynicism and distrust of political and social institutions seems to be a hallmark of the times. Issues related to personal freedom and property gain far more attention than other matters. In general, the people seem to display little knowledge of or interest in the rest of the world.

It is within this context that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) are called to serve and confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and the gospel as the power of God for the salvation of all who believe.

In reference to ecumenism, both churches are involved in strong ecumenical alliances with several mainline churches, although this has not been without some contention on issues related to historical episcopacy.

The issues challenging the church and sparking passionate and sometimes, divisive debate are racism, gender equity, the place of gay and lesbian people, abortion, capital punishment, clergy sexual misconduct, violence, economic and social justice. A critical issue for the church is the need to become a church that more closely resembles the changing complexion of North America—that is to reach and include "people of color" whose presence in the ELCA currently is barely above the two percent mark.

Some approaches to finding appropriate expressions of what is church started from biblical metaphors like the kingdom, or the *oikos* or household of God. Others focused on a new consciousness of values such as justice, peace, and integrity of creation which could undergird an alternative culture and ethics

of life, dialogue and tolerance, sharing and solidarity, nonviolence and peace. Still others crystallize around concepts like *koinonia* or life.

There are common features to all approaches—a vision that affirms life and relationships and community; a vision that inspires rebuilding and reconstruction of community inclusive of differences and diversities; a vision, finally, that reaches beyond the future of church and society and embraces God's entire creation. However, the decisive question will be whether the vision can be translated into a project for action and inspire renewed education and learning. The ministries are seen to exist in order to serve and build up the Christian community, the church, and the church exists as the living embodiment of the gospel message. The role of all ministries is to enable the church to become viable communities of hope and healing, inclusive communities of sharing in solidarity, communities that build and sustain relationships of reconciliation and mutual empowerment. This vision cannot easily be reconciled with the reality of churches as social bodies. The church has come out of the world, yet it is nevertheless *in* the world and not exempt from the conflicts of humankind.

All social relationships, especially within the framework of organizations and institutions, are shaped by power. Ministry as leadership in the community shares in the exercise of power, if only spiritual power. All those in positions of power are exposed to the temptation of dominating the community, and church hierarchies are no exception. Churches are not perfect communities but through Jesus Christ and in his gospel they have a means of opening a way to the fullness of life—not on the basis of competitive success and dominating power, but through sharing, self-giving, and forgiveness. The viability of the Christian community and indeed of its ministries will depend on whether they allow themselves, in their imperfection and brokenness, to be renewed and transformed by confession and forgiveness and thus to be empowered to live as the body of Christ broken for the world. The character of the church, its vocation, its message, and the success of its missionary endeavor force it to be concerned not only with the tensions of the world but also to be involved in these tensions.

Some Notable Strengths of the North American Church

- The liturgy and liturgical resources and efforts to renew worship, ritual, music, and ceremony.
- The organizational structure of the church which can be used to deploy available energies and resources where they are most urgently needed and best utilized.
- A relatively active involvement in the issues of the urban communities.
- Its ecumenicity, both locally and internationally.

- The acknowledgment of experience as an essential starting point for learning and doing theology.
- A progressive theological stance and openness to advances in knowledge.
- The study, analysis, interpretation of social and cultural issues, and documentation of the same.
- Its efforts to make the church inclusive, particularly of women but also the recognition of the need to be welcoming of other ethnic communities.

It should be noted that the above were gleaned from the reports made by participants who did portray a high level of awareness regarding the many issues confronting the church and who have been rather actively involved in addressing several of these issues. In my estimation they represented a significant but small section of the Lutheran community in North America, whose opinions may not necessarily reflect those of the majority.

Some Issues for Further Elaboration and Reflection by the North American Church

A.

1. It has been pointed out that despite the availability of new and inclusive liturgical resources there are still many congregations that do not have them. Liturgy therefore in many areas is still rather cerebral and verbose with little room for spontaneity and far removed from the surrounding context.
2. It is through the liturgy that the church keeps alive the memory of the past but also brings to the altar the concerns of the present and educates its membership on issues of the present. John Chrysostom speaks of two altars, one in the sanctuary of the temple and the second in the market place. But in addition there is the liturgy that endeavors to bring the whole of life within the realm of the sacred—the liturgy after the liturgy. The important thing is not to lose sight of it that the two altars are to be linked: the experience around the altar in the sanctuary is a foretaste of an experience to be had on a larger scale. At the *koinonia* around the holy table in the liturgy there is a vision of God inviting all humanity to participate in God's celestial gifts—the sharing of one bread and one cup together within the church must have its counterpart in the life of the community. As we share the same eucharistic bread, we must also share our food and existence with our neighbors. Such spirituality tries to reach the transcendent while remaining firmly rooted in everyday reality and life.

Our liturgy becomes sterile when it is separated from serving our neighbor. In the rhythm of the Christian community as it gathers and scatters,

inhales and exhales, these two distinct ministries are necessary. The community that gathers in the church and disperses in the city is the church.

B.

1. It was noted that experience, and reflection on experience, is an essential starting point for learning, for doing theology, for engaging in political activities, and for acting toward systemic change. If experience is the primary criterion for collaboration, the question in the multicultural context of North America is, "whose experience?" Should one strive for commonality or is it the importance of the concrete or specific issue which takes primary significance? Different perspectives must be clearly articulated and understood by all participants.
2. The creation of new language, new myth, and new symbol based on diverse experiences is needed as the church moves forward towards wholeness.

C.

It was also noted that the membership in the church is falling and that in some synods large sections of the community are unchurched despite the church's presence in the area. Could the actionism or involvement of the church in the community be a form of escapism designed to hide the spiritual crisis of individuals or the church as a whole? Conversely, those who really feel the need to belong to a church are the minorities who are also relatively poor. But they claim that the Lutheran church is not welcoming enough, and hence even 12 years after the formation of the ELCA, there are only a little over two percent of people of color within the church.

D.

A first-time visitor to the ELCA's headquarters will be struck by the sophisticated organizational structure of the church. Such organization can be used freely for the church's mission, of course, but this efficiency is achieved at the expense of human values. There is reason to assert that the church in the present generation has been very much concerned with its tents. While this is the most obvious in our preoccupations with the refinement of ecclesiastical machinery, its more subtle and pervasive expression has been flight from the world through immersion in church programs which invest the large bulk of lay resources in the institution. When the institution becomes an end in itself, the people of God lose not only the vision of mission but also their identity. The structures of the church are hierarchical. By being forced into dominant-subordinate roles, those not in power are by definition excluded. Even within collective styles of leadership, power dynamics, issues of authority, and questions of status do not necessarily disappear.

E.

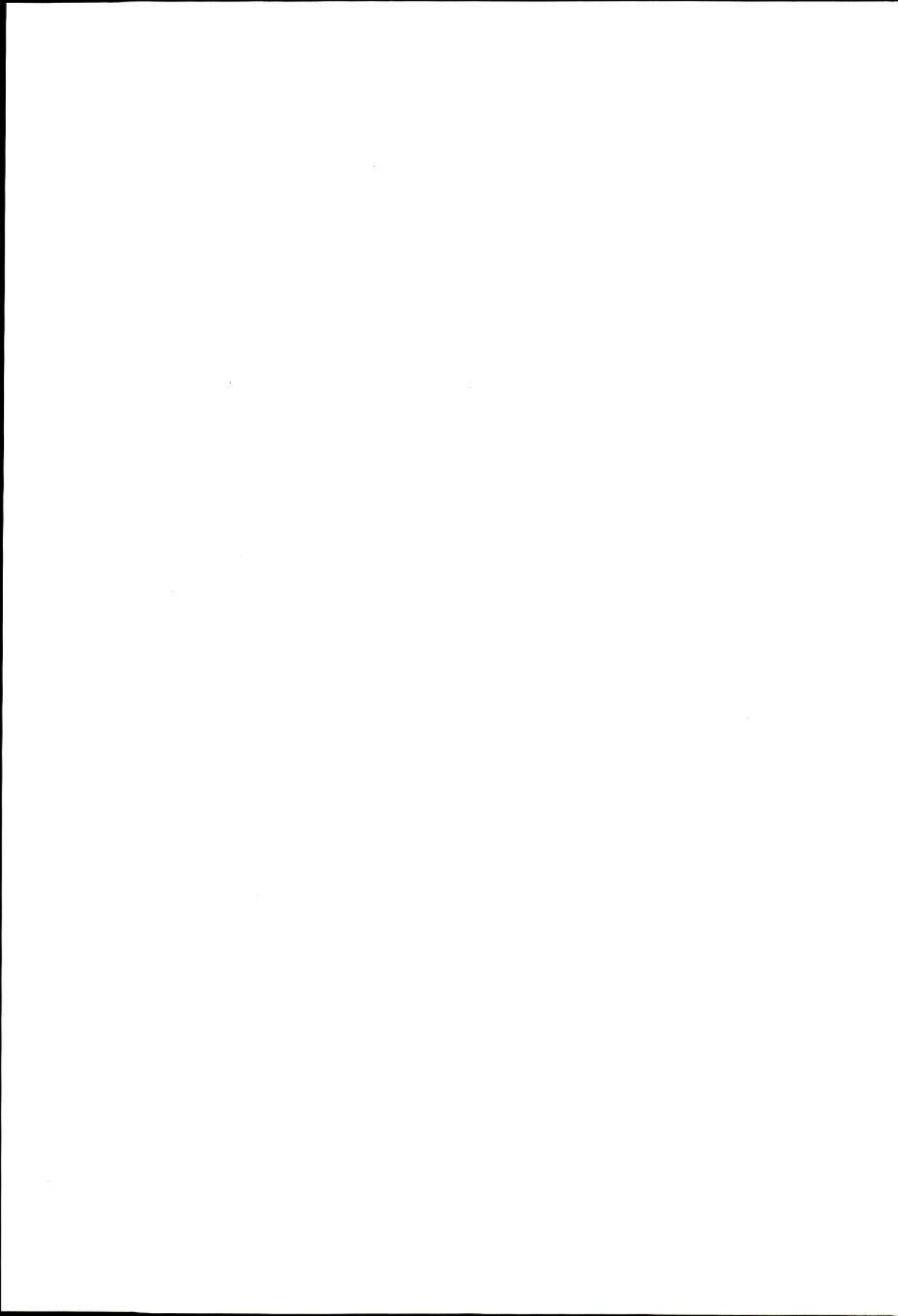
One needs to ask what impact of the vast amount of research and documentation on social and cultural issues has made on the local congregation? Has

the research had any influence whatsoever on how the local congregation responds to these issues? Have the local congregations or representatives from the rural areas been involved in these study projects?

Conclusion

In an article written in 1977, Philip Hefner speaks of how the middle-class orientation of the Lutheran Church in America (LCA) has affected the manner in which the Lutheran church perceives of itself and the manner in which it has guided its ministry of word and service.¹ Much of what he said over 20 years ago is still applicable to the ELCA and to a lesser extent to the ELCIC today. The Lutheran church is still largely of Northern European descent and middle class, and even the small minority of people of color within the church are drawn also from the middle class. This homogeneity and difference at the same time stand out as the most recognizable feature of the church. It is largely urban with much attention paid to urban issues and has therefore not adequately addressed the concerns of the rural communities. But its openness to modern knowledge and its theological openness should enable it to be more receptive to diversity that it encounters in the urban areas with people of diverse ethnic communities and their cultures. There are within the church sufficient resources that can be tapped to make it a church. It needs to work towards becoming truly inclusive—that is multi-racial, sensitive to both urban and rural issues, less organizational, and more community based. The Lutheran church seems to be a community on the march; a project in the making; a new order which has come but not yet in its fullness.

¹ Cf. Philip Hefner, "The Identity and Mission of the Church: Theological Reflections on the Concrete Existence of the Lutheran Church in America," in *The Identity of the Church and its Service to the Whole Human Being*, Final Volume I, Reports on 35 Self-Study Projects in 46 Churches, (Geneva: LWF/DTS, 1977) pp. 177-233.



Lutheran Profile: Churches on the Way to their Given Identity

Joachim Track

The visits to the congregations in Chicago and the presentations and the discussions during the consultation have produced a fascinating picture of the two churches, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, the situations in their countries, their possibilities and limitations, their strengths and weaknesses. They have raised a number of questions, and provided some new insights.

The Church in a Changing World

Attention was drawn to the process of globalization, to the transition from modernity to post-modernity. This change was seen as a challenge to the churches requiring new ways of thinking and of acting. More clearly than at other consultations, it was recognized that this change is also happening inside the church, whether the church likes it or not. It is necessary to define more clearly what is really new, globally and regionally in the different countries, and locally in our societies and our Christian congregations.

On social change: A few key ideas which characterize the rapid social change were highlighted: a new universality has emerged; our world has shrunk; process of growing conformity and uniformity has started; the scientific, technological civilization of the North, mainly of North America and Europe, increasingly determines this world. Thanks to the new information technology, the media, and vastly increased mobility, we can find out what happens in the furthest corners of the world. Decisions taken in remote places, such as the use of the rain forests, also concern us. Worldwide economic structures create links and a growing mutual dependency which influence our styles of working and living. Competition is everywhere. The speed of the change is increasing, and this change tolerates neither mistakes nor wrong decisions. Our use of the world's resources will determine the lives of future generations. Growing uniformity goes hand in hand with a clear tendency towards differentiation, with a deepening of the disparities between societies; differences between rich and poor, between the periphery and the center, between lenders and borrowers are growing. This leads to processes of individualization and of pluralization. The change is characterized by its universality, its complexity and its irreversibility in many areas.

In this context, attention focused mainly on globalization resulting from neo-liberalism and affecting the social, political and cultural areas. Whereas I would agree that economic factors predominate in the process of globalization I would prefer a more differentiated understanding. Rather, I would suggest that we should not speak too quickly about the "almighty dollar," and thereby to distance ourselves from the problem. Although it is true that we have to live with the "almighty dollar," this is not the whole truth. We have to ask ourselves why the dollar is so almighty or, more precisely, why economic factors have come to be so predominant.

All of us are responsible for the predominance of the economy, not just business, finance and the stock markets. We are all playing the game because, as people living in the Northern hemisphere, we enjoy its advantages. It is our life-style which endangers the environment, e.g. our use of energy. We fix costs and prices in such a way that they are to our benefit and do not reflect true costs of production and use of natural resources. We are not only the victims of economic domination but also its perpetrators.

There are no simply answers and solutions. But, if things are to change we must do more than simply complain about the effects of globalization. As men and women, citizens and Christians and as churches in this world, we are challenged to find new, humane and ecologically friendly ways.

On cultural and religious change: The cultural and religious changes were described in impressive ways in the areas of media and communication. A revolution in the area of communication, the invention of the printing-press (Gutenberg), originally enabled the Reformation churches to flourish. They have been shaped by the cultural heritage of Europe in their ways of discourse, and the style and expression of cultural life in the arts. But, the style of culture is changing in the transition from a written to an electronic culture which, in a novel way, is geared to seeing, hearing and experiencing. Not only the means of communication have changed but also the contents and values. Growing individualization means that one's own achievements are no longer oriented towards the community. Our values are increasingly shaped by soap operas, Hollywood's film-makers and advertising. It is interesting that none of these can do without religious themes. They include them and play with them because they know of their power to arouse deep emotions. This is also true for the use of "sin," which theologians have always maintained would no longer be understandable today. The religious situation has also changed. What we as enlightened people and modern theologians did not think possible, has happened.

- Instead of progressive secularization there is a new turning to religion;
- new interest in meditation, but also a new interest in spiritualist practices including satanic cults;

- a new understanding of the power of the spirit which influences a group or an individual;
- a new interest in the healing power of religion.

Is this a rediscovery of a lost dimension (Paul Tillich)? Or is it an escape into the "beautiful beyond" because this world is so inhospitable, and exhausted by attempts at reform, we have given up trying to change the world? Is it the development of new forms of syncretism, or is it a helpful and fruitful "ecumenism" of religions?

The Lutheran churches in transition: All the contributions emphasized that the church has to face the challenges of the social, cultural and religious change, and to share in them. But how is the church to face this?

It became evident that the Lutheran churches in the U.S. are facing up to the socio-ethical challenges and to their responsibility for the world in new ways. Traditionally starting from the separation between church and state, the church today recognizes the need for a socio-ethical orientation and a socio-ethical commitment in public life, in society and in politics (*cf.* The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective). In a remarkable way this statement perceives the church's responsibility in society and for society to be the task of individual Christian men and women, the task of the church at different levels. It is a social ethic which is oriented towards the themes of justice, peace and integrity of creation and emphasizes the churches' task of reconciliation.

Equally impressive is the new way in which the diaconal task to and in society is understood. The structural aspect of the diaconal task is perceived as no longer only dealing with the relief of suffering and concrete help locally, but seeks to change the causes of social deprivation and suffering.

In this context it is striking that no consensus can be reached regarding individual ethical questions such as, personal life-style and forms of cohabitation of the sexes including the obviously much discussed understanding of homosexuality, and of same-sex relationships and partnerships. Here I see the greatest need for discussion and understanding between a traditional ethic based on the insights of previous centuries and a new ethic for modern life derived from a critical reading of the gospel.

This leads to a study of changes in culture and values. In this context I particularly remember two remarkable contributions to the discussion. One of the participants said that although in the church and theology we are appropriating the modern media, this was not just a technical appropriation of modern means of communication but an intensive encounter with the "culture" connected to it. It involved a change of perception of the reality of ethical socialization, of processes of understanding, learning and appropriation of values. (John Lynner Peterson) In this the Lutheran churches – like the church at large – are still only at the beginning. The second contribution summed

up the matter in a rather ironic way. We love variety, the richness and fullness of diversity, we love change as long as it does not touch us. (Steven Robertson; Walter Stuhr) I noticed that here, too, there is a task for us: We have to deal with pluralism, with differences and divergences, with changing attitudes and values which always occurs under the tension between maintenance and tradition on the one hand, and the openness for new experiences and insights on the other.

This also characterizes the way in which we deal with new religious challenges. A new understanding of the significance of symbols and of worship experienced in community, of the importance of new forms of worship and meditation practices is developing all over the world. Attention has to be drawn to the new emphasis on the Lord's Supper as the place for experienced communion with Jesus Christ and with one another, a place where God's acceptance of and turning to human beings is experienced, a place for reconciliation, a place where faith is lived and practiced. The church of God's Word opens new holistic ways of access to faith and to the communion of faith. The question of how we are to find the way between an ultimately enslaving religious superstition which makes false promises (Pablo Espinoza) and an evangelical spirituality characterized by evangelical freedom and trust in the changing power of the acts of the Holy Spirit, however, still requires further thought.

Experience and Lutheran Identity.

As at the previous consultations in Asia, Africa and Latin America, two key concepts played a dominant role. One was the question of a Lutheran identity, and the other the question of the experience of faith. While the search for identity is a task which always confronts the church, in the light of the present change it seems to me to be particularly urgent now. Identity is always both given to us and at the same time to be found and shaped. We owe it to the work of the Holy Spirit that we find our identity as Christian women and men in faith and in the church. In Christ we are reconciled with God and become a new creation. Our identity is given in the call to be the image of God, in God's act of reconciliation, in the cross and the resurrection. On the other hand we are also responsible for our identity. Just as faith has to enter into life so our identity has to take shape. We are our own and each others' interpreters. The way we think, speak, act and live determines our identity as persons and as a community of faith. God wants to be effective in us and with us. Thus, identity is always formed in the tension between not being able to produce my own identity however hard I may try because it is always given, and being responsible for who and what I am. The Swiss poet Max Frisch once said that he could tell any number of stories but not the story of his life. Thus the shaping of identity always happens in the tension between the I

which I am, and the Self which I may be and want to be. The same is true for the church. Our identity is always an identity on the way.

The question of identity, therefore, leads straight to the key concept of experience. We owe our identity to the Word of God, to God's promise which becomes experience in faith. By emphasizing experience in this way the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is returning to basic insights of the Reformation and the pietistic tradition and highlighting them anew. Luther emphasized that the Word of God becomes alive and understandable in its depth, there where it is not only acknowledged externally but where it becomes a living, liberating, saving experience. Faith is an experience of discovery in which the truth and reality of the gospel is opened up, an experience which redefines all other experiences. Such an experience cannot be produced, it happens, it is given to us: The sinner experiences God's promise and mercy. The "no" to Jesus Christ in his crucifixion is answered by God's "yes," the place of disaster becomes for us the beginning of new salvation. We have been included in the responsibility to bring this experience of faith into life. God's Word of the gospel needs to be translated into and explained in the concrete situation, God's promise to be unfolded in Word and sacrament.

Against the background of the insights of contextual and feminist theologies, it is new to say that it not only is necessary to "translate" the experience of faith into the different contexts, but that, in the situations of life and suffering in which we find ourselves, in the contexts which determine us, the gospel is heard and understood in a new way. The experiences of our life and the different contexts also disclose to us anew the meaning of God's justice and liberation. They allow us to hear the gospel critically in a new way.

Without defining it as such, the presentations and discussions nevertheless showed that this is a dual process. On the one hand, there is the movement of bringing the word to experience, into life, into the context, and on the other hand the movement of disclosing afresh the meaning of the gospel for the present time out of the context and against the background of one's own experience. It therefore seems to me to be essential to plead for a church, and for a church concept, which understands the church as the place of experience and a place where practice is interpreted together. What is needed is a community of faith where the uniqueness and individuality of the each person's experience of faith is respected and experiences are shared. A community of experience is needed which knows that it does not owe the liberating experience of the gospel to its own efforts but that it has been entrusted with the responsibility for the interpretation of this experience, and for the living form which it gives to it. A missionary witness to our experience of faith is required, and empowerment for service in the world which is part of it.

This includes a realistic view of reality. The realism required will perceive and acknowledge sensitively the opposition, the injustices and the sufferings in this world because it knows at the same time that God always opens new

possibilities. It needs the discernment of spirits, the recognition of the roots of suffering and evil, and an openness for a new liberating experience. (Pablo Espinoza, Arthur Leichnitz)

What is Reconciled Diversity? Observations on the Understanding of *Communio*.

What can the church be? Is it simply a mirror image of society? Or is it a counter-model, a new image of how, in the midst of this world, faith, love and hope can take shape, and community can be realized in the approach of God's kingdom? Both ideas were discussed.

The critical description of the experiences in this church and the self-critical evaluation of its reality surprised me. It became clear to me how much racist prejudices, behavior and attitudes active in society also continue to be at work in the church, both among its perpetrators and its victims. The distribution of power, the power structures and their uses were analyzed very clearly. The disparity of power between church leadership, regional synods and local congregations was clearly discussed. Is the Lutheran church ultimately only a church dominated by the white middle class? The question was asked whether one is only open for the others, for the differences, so long as the others do not become a "critical mass" that could change the nature of one's own church. Is the leadership of the church with its ideas of a church as an open community in which all, regardless of origin, social standing, race or gender are recognized and find their equal place, not too far removed from the true feelings of its members? I noted with admiration the honesty and courage with which even the negative sides of the life of the church were discussed.

The church was described, not only as one in which the power of the old, the power of sin is at work but, with equal conviction, also as one which is becoming the sign for what is new, one in which our God-given community finds its form in witness and service. Two phrases stand out in particular. The first, "we are on the way." We are on the way to a new understanding and a new shape of the church in which differences and diversities are reconciled, in which justice has its place, experiences are shared, solidarity is lived, in which the ministry understands itself as service. The second, "we are successful, we are progressing." This expresses an optimistic outlook on life which does not give in; it shows a readiness to mention one's own success, to do good and also to speak about it. Firing others with enthusiasm is only possible if one is oneself enthusiastic about one's own cause. This attitude certainly is attractive to Europeans who are accustomed not to mention the good which they do.

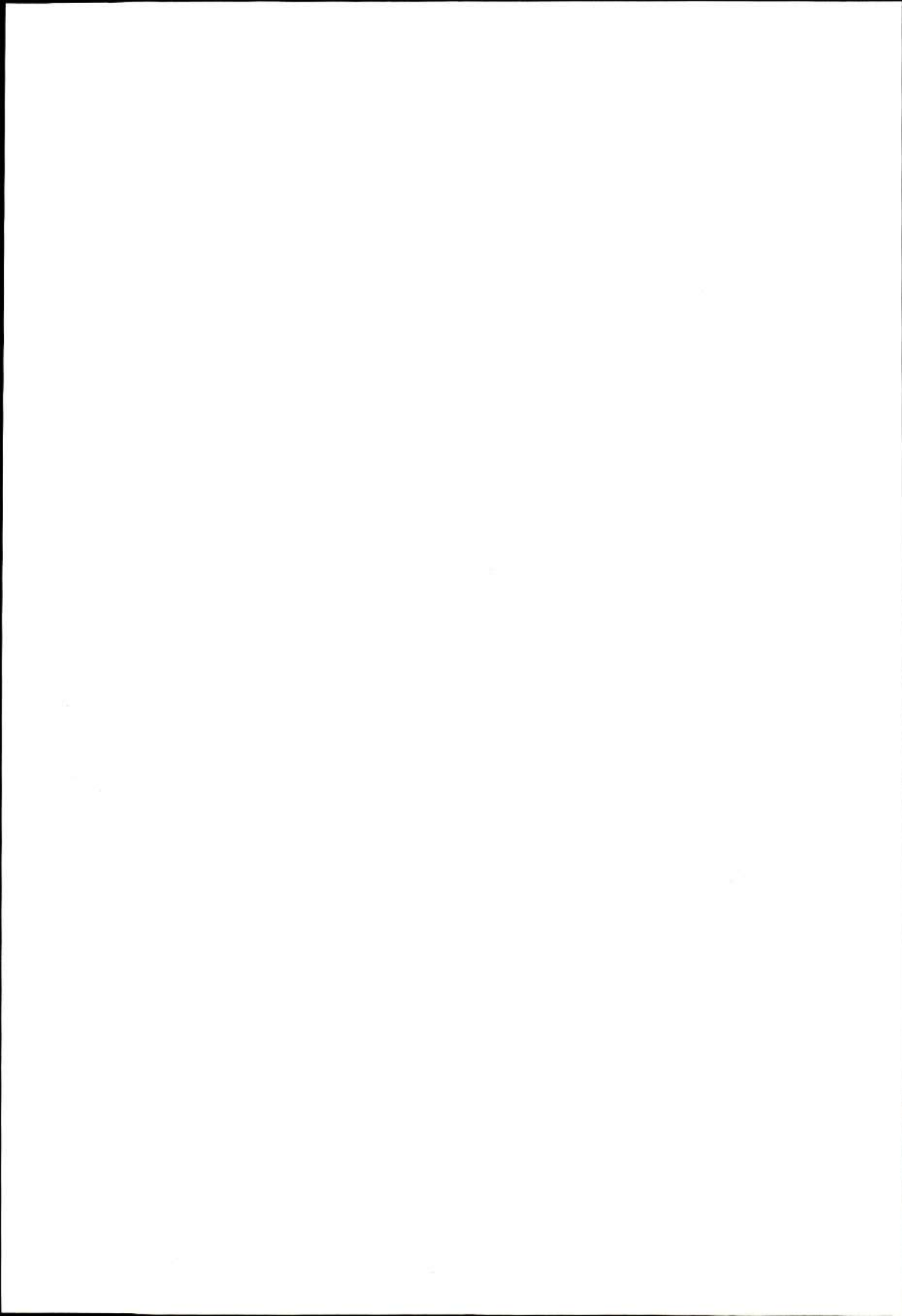
This duality raised a question for me. It is true that the church always realizes itself in a tension. It is the church of justified sinners in which the power

of protest and opposition to our calling is at work, and at the same time the church of justified sinners in whom the God-given new has its beginning and turns us into people who give room to God's love. But why were the two descriptions, of the actual church as mirror image of this world, and of the church as the image of the new, so unconnected and sometimes placed next to each other in a dualistic way?

The most far-reaching challenge facing the church at all times seems to me to be both the acceptance of the fragility and brokenness, of the darkened form of the church in time, which Luther called the hiddenness of the new under the cross, and the perception of the new which has entered our world. The church may and must be conscious of its eschatological existence between the ages. This does not relativize what is new.

It is part of reconciled diversity that we do not deny the reality of the power of sin which is at work in our world and in the church, that we do not repress or exclude our guilt and failure where, in order to gain our own life, we destroy other lives and, in order to keep our self-esteem, we despise others. To be a Christian means that the unfulfilled aspects of humanity and creatureliness must not be forgotten or repressed. Humans and nature must be helped to realize their rights. It is part of the church's commitment not to remain silent when basic human rights are violated, and to work for changes in society. It has to become the advocate of a reconciling spirituality and give room to such experiences in worship and in life. In concrete situations this means that we have to give direction to people in their search for identity and the art of living, and witness anew to the power of Christian hope and patience.

One of the strengths of Protestantism in particular is that it does not rely on the model of being a rock in the midst of change, immovably attached to traditional values. Its point of departure is God's merciful presence and incarnation in the world in Jesus Christ. This encourages us and challenges us. I would therefore like to use the term "critical mass" in a constructive way. We have to become such a "critical mass" in society.



The Lutheran Church in North America: A Mirror of Society

Guillermo Hansen

As we gathered on our first day at the Lutheran Center the main issues that are here developed were unfolding in front of me as I listened to the two presentations and the dialogue that ensued. The first presentation (by John Lynner Peterson) addressed the power of the media in American culture and the new epistemologies that characterize it. While I could mostly agree with what was said, it was nonetheless very strange to me to hear the tacit conclusion among all those present. The discussion referred to an Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) "out of touch" with American culture. I was struck by not only the one-dimensional conception of culture (as well as the exaggeration as to the real power of the media) but also the naiveté with which, all of a sudden, people *pretended* that their church did not reflect U.S. culture. Not only my previous knowledge of the Lutheran church in the U.S., but the very development of the consultation as such eventually would confirm my initial suspicions. This is a church that very much *mirrors* its surrounding culture—for better or for worse.

Church and culture: This was the first main pillar for my bridge-building or, as one participant noted, for sailing in the peculiar waters and winds of the Lutheran churches in North America. The rubric could also be presented as "church and society," but I prefer the former. It underscores the realm of symbols and values that is enclosed under the term "culture." The issue to be posed here is to what extent the church reflects or embodies the dominant values of society, and how does it mediate symbolically the divisive issues that every society confronts.

A concrete example will suffice here: multiculturalism. The force with which the ELCA has embraced the cause of multiculturalism is certainly highly commendable. This was a vivid component of our deliberations. Yet the question is to what extent the church simply adapts to the politically correct discourse of "difference" (celebrating the incommensurable, the autonomous) ending up *de facto* legitimizing a sort of multicultural separatism. Does the church make any difference to (a) the way in which one perceives one's "essential" identity and (b) the extent to which one's identity group relates with others? Does not a sense of "reconciled diversity" being too hastily attached to that of multiculturalism, cloud the conflicts and tensions that simmer below the surface? Is not the church also a social proposal that redefines boundaries and identity markers that the civil and political communities take for granted?

In this context it was strange that some of the remarks made during the second presentation of our first day were not picked up. Dr. James Wind, president of the Alban Institute, spoke of 11 adaptive challenges facing congregations and churches in the context of the U.S., two of which I consider very meaningful for my emphasis. These are (1) the shifting of traditional ways of demarking identities from something that was prescribed to something that is achieved, and (2) the important notion of *mestizaje*, introduced by the Chicano theology of Virgilio Elizondo. It seems to me that in these two concepts lies the key for social proposals which the church may embody sacramentally at the local as well as the national level. How do we embody a different vision even if it implies stepping on many toes?

Some of the strengths and richness of this church deserve special mention. This richness is represented by diversity, the wide scope of its international relations, and stewardship.

Diversity: This is not so much an issue of different traditions lumped together, but the "negotiations" between them which makes this church so rich. It creates debate, discussion, open dissent and therefore growth. This is an aspect that the church inherits from the vast territory and the constant sociological influx that is peculiar to a quite "open society"—at least as compared to other countries that we visited.

International relationships: It is a fact that the different Lutheran bodies that were the predecessors of the ELCA strongly shared a classical paternalistic and messianic model of mission which rode the crest of an expanding American culture with its concomitant political, economic, and military influence. In part this allowed for a notorious presence in countries traditionally considered "mission fields," Latin America included. But at the same time the efforts to transform this mother-daughter relationship into models focused on interdependence or accompaniment, which gives a quite international and "catholic" profile to this church—at least at the level of its self-understanding—are remarkable.

Stewardship: The strict distinction and separation between State and church made of all denominational bodies in the U.S. cases of "free churches"—as far as its institutional arrangements were concerned. Some of the results of such an arrangement are the deep seriousness and commitment with which the financial matters of the church are handled, and the encouragement of an active participation by the people.

Europe

A Swedish Experience: A Glimpse of Europe

Guillermo Hansen

Zooropa...Vorsprung durch Technik
Zooropa...be all that you can be
Be a winner
Eat to get slimmer...

...And I have no compass
And I have no map
And I have no reasons
No reasons to get back...
(U2, "Zooropa", 1993)

I departed for Sweden from the mythical town of Hamlet, Helsingør. I remember, as if it were happening right now, the clouds of mist that the ferry sliced through effortlessly in its slide toward the other shore. It was as if everything plotted to unleash a specific mood: the mist evoked a sense of mystery; the mystery in turn anticipated the mystical spirit of the land of the Swedes. So it was that as I entered Sweden my memory seized by the words of my countryman, Jorge Luis Borges, who thought of Scandinavia as a kind of a dream, something outside ordinary time, a sort of crystal sphere unperturbed by the hastiness of the rest of the world.¹ Was this a foretaste of what was about to come? Or is it a simple, *post-factum* reconstruction in my attempt to "map" the place of Scandinavia—and that of all Europe—in the Lutheran planisphere?

The deep sound of a siren awakened me from my rapture, though the melancholy of the landscape stayed with me during the rest of my visit. After crossing the sound separating Denmark from Sweden, and while I was rolling through the beautiful green fields of Skåne, I began to think about the pattern that our series of conferences have had. We had started in Europe, in the forest of Grand-Saconnex on the outskirts of Geneva, Switzerland, and now we were ending our journey in Europe, in the forests of Höör, not far away from Lund. I still do not know why the scholastic image of *exitus* and *reditus* came to my mind as I pondered our perambulations; it is a known fact that scholasticism and Lutheranism do not come together well, but somehow this image erupted from the crevices of my psyche. A Freudian slip? A free association embroiled with the illogical? Or perhaps a window to a vital component of the Lutheran collective unconscious, a manifestation of the very "being" of Lutheranism? We were coming home, *hjem*, *heimwärts*; Europe, the

¹ Jorge Luis Borges, "Borge oral," in *Obras completas*, vol. IV (Barcelona: Emecé Editores, 1996), p. 187.

mother, the refuge, our mighty fortress. Finally we could see the "familiar" Lutheran *notae*: crossed flags (the colors don't matter), nice country, cozy farms, tidiness, fine food, healthy people, good taste, social democracy. Yes, we were coming back, from the far country where the "others" live.

Coming to the environs of Lund, to one of the hearts of Lutheranism, was undeniably symbolic. It was indeed a moving prospect for me, for as long as I can remember in my church's headquarters in Argentina, there has hung an aged picture with a tattered photograph of a very imposing building surrounded by a host of signatures—where one can still make out the names of Anders Nygren, Sylvester Michelfelder, Hanns Lilje, and Erling Eidem, among others. They were greeting our church on occasion of the First Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation in Lund (1947). We always cherished this odd-looking picture, in spite of the unattractiveness of a conglomerate of nearly unintelligible signatures signifying even more unintelligible names. (A sign of our regard for this picture is that, strange as it may sound, this is one of the few hanging photographs that have survived the countless moves of our church headquarters). Lund was also symbolic in another way: on a more academic note, what Lutheran theologian can escape the association of this one place with some of the most prominent theologians of the 20th century? To scrutinize the landscape that maybe inspired Gustaf Aulén as he wrote *Christus Victor*, Anders Nygren with his *Agape and Eros*, or Gustaf Wingren writing *Creation and Law* added a sense of awe to the already awesomeness for the Lutheran consciousness of such a location. We were in a sort of "sacred ground," *axis lutherani*, a hierophanic center that breaks the homogeneity of ecumenical space.² Perhaps Lund is only superseded in the Lutheran universe by the mantra-sounding inscription on the Prussian helmet-like tower of the castle-church in Wittenberg, "*Eine feste Burg ist unser Gott*". Be that as it may, we were in a corner of the foundational soil of Lutheranism...*exitus et reditus*.

However, is this the only portrait? Could some of the archetypes of the Lutheran unconscious be enriched by a different imagery, perhaps with some that reveal, in fact, several centers, several homes? It is certainly difficult to stand up to Europe—its history, its achievements, its culture are simply breathtaking. In the case of Lutheranism, difficulty is replaced by thorniness, for contrary to what is the norm with other churches, the history of our branch of the Reformation is deeply intertwined with the history of northern Europe. Until quite recently, to be thoroughly conversant in Lutheranism implied a good acquaintance with—if not deep knowledge of—the theological and ecclesiological developments in Germany and Scandinavia, not to mention with their national languages, so distant from the beauty of Latin! After all, to

² From a phenomenological point of view, who can escape the imposing features of Lund's cathedral (or Roskilde, or the castle-church of Wittenberg, or Saint Lawrence church in Nuremberg, to mention only a few)? As the megaliths of the past, they exercise the mysterious charm proper of an *axis mundi*, of a transcendental gate communicating our space-time with the eternal.

be in Europe is to be in the place where our confessional identity was forged. Even the solid and massive walls of Lund's cathedral—as a symbol standing for Europe in general—seemed to conspire in this: it was as though its shadows threatened to engulf our fragile, newly gained non-European Lutheran citizenship.

So we were “coming back,” revisiting history. But were we coming back to the future of Lutheranism? Were we really coming to its center, to its fortress, to its hub? It is certainly difficult to give a totally objective picture, not only because ideologically one may have an accumulated knapsack of prejudices, but above all because Lund, Europe, was our *last* regional meeting. For those of us who as an international core group were present in all the regional conferences, we certainly came back to (Lutheran) Europe with different eyes, with a different spirit. I believe that not only we now saw Europe as one more region, but also we saw Europe through the lenses of the challenges, vitalities, and splendor of all the Lutheran churches visited before. So our *reditus* was a sort of Trojan horse, with a belly full of new perspectives and newly gained “centers” from whence to look at our “mother” churches. This allowed us—beyond our own narrow regionalisms, which we all have—to view how European are the Europeans! How tainted with their purview is the implicit, tongue-in-cheek universality underlying every gesture, every word, every statement referring to the Lutheran ethos! Furthermore, how alien to the rest of us are these peel-away coatings of Christendom that still form so much a part of their church structures!

Yet Europe, Scandinavia, continues to fascinate us. Their people, their history, their culture—how affluent it is! Whatever we say, it will always retain this kind of allure that Borges so well described. Like the midnight sun, there is a light that glows even when its vital source is barely visible on the horizon. Those of us who are far away will always cherish this gleaming, even gaze and look for it, though it has never been a luminosity intended for us. For that reason it seemed almost unreal when one early morning, peacefully strolling along a gorgeous pond close to our lodgings, there emerged from the haze a tampered-with warning sign at the edge of the path. For could it be that the well-educated, polite, so socially-democratized and nature-loving Swedes really mean “*Fiske för jude*” (fish for Jews) where it should have read “*Fiske förbjudet*” (No fishing)? Fish, smells... is there something rotten here? The missing “b” and “t” seemed so *out of place*, so un-Scandinavian, so impossible within the perfection and beauty of this crystal sphere. Perhaps this was just the doing of mischievous youths. Perhaps also like the graffiti crying “*Ausländer raus!*” that adorns many walls in Germany. Surely disgruntled youth, nothing to worry about. Or should we?

In any case, from now on I shall be more careful with the charming effects of this place, and even wonder—oh, what blasphemy!—whether my cherished Borges was not overly-mesmerized by the charm of the Northern skies.

The Globalization of Culture and Religions¹

Elisabeth Gerle

Culture

The globalization of culture is sometimes described as homogenization, an American standardization of tastes and desires leading to the "McDonaldization" of the world. This is a face of globalization that is synonymous with Westernization and modernization and reflects the power of the empire to influence values and tastes all over the world.

Yet such dominance does not lead only to submission, acquiescence, or resistance. This global culture is also creating new forms of literature, music, and art, in which the former colonies "write back"—to use the expression of Edward Said. Salman Rushdie is perhaps the most prominent example, mixing traditional Indian myths and experiences with cosmopolitan London views. New music emerges in Paris and London—but also in Malmö and Brooklyn—where African, Latino, and European rhythms and styles meet. Hybridization of cultures is a global phenomenon that happens locally. If the post-colonial discourse about "creolization," ambivalence, and multiple identities has been shaped mainly by a third-world elite often living in the United States or in Europe, there are nevertheless many local expressions of both ambivalence and creativity emerging from the need to respond to a hegemonic global culture.

In a romantic sense of multiculturalism, people in a local place from various cultural and religious backgrounds live next to each other as neighbors. Cultures are seen as monolithic and static, living side by side on an equal footing and with mutual respect. Reality is much more complex and non-symmetrical. Many neighborhoods are segregated along cultural, ethnic, or religious lines, which in practice often entails economic inequalities. The tendency to "culturalize" inequalities² is often disguised by talking of a "global village" while asylum-seekers and other immigrants are forced to live in deprived neighborhoods where people of the receiving country hardly ever go. The monolithic features that some communities develop in such situations could be

¹ Excerpts from an article first published in *The Ecumenical Review*, vol. 52, number 2, April 2000 (Geneva: WCC), pp. 158-164. Part of this article was presented at the European regional consultation.

² Alexandra Alund and C.U. Schierup, *Paradoxes of Multiculturalism* (Aldershot: Gower, 1991).

understood more as a cultural response to imposed stigmatization and experiences of inferiority in relation to the majority population and to other groups, than as genuine essential cultural differences.

Still, it is a fact that people of various backgrounds, cultures, and religions meet and intermingle to a larger extent today than ever before. With people from various backgrounds influencing each other, "hybridization" or "creolization" thus also become key words in understanding this dimension of globalization. People in late modernity increasingly live with overlapping identities.

For some, however, the intensity of the encounter with alien cultures feels threatening and leads to claims for borders, for protecting one's own culture. Often this need is wrapped in rhetoric about "community"—coming from both left and right. Communitarians of the left talk about multicultural or indigenous communities in need of protection against McDonaldization and corporate power, while those on the right tend to look to the market as the path to freedom and autonomy.

Conservatives value community because it promises social stability, a self-reliant population that does not drain resources away from the state or the market; by contrast, community activists in the socialist tradition see community as the generator of resistance to the state and, especially, resistance to corporate power—the power of developers, employers, polluters and profit-makers.³

Communitarian values, expressed locally to protect small communities against overpowering forces, are also expanded to whole regions of the world. In the Muslim world, the Islamization of states and communities is introduced as a way to uphold or recreate a Muslim identity in order to protect oneself against the West, in terms of economic dominance as well as values. Radical attempts to organize welfare in such areas hand in hand with conservative family politics and the increasing power of *sharia*. The tendency in these contexts to apply a double standard for women and men has been pointed out by the Muslim theologian Riffat Hassan. At the UN women's conference in Beijing in 1995, she argued that when men want something that is permeating the West it is called modernization, while if women claim equality, for example, it is denounced as Westernization.

Also in the West there are communitarian attempts, Christian as well as Muslim, to use traditional values as a shield or a barrier against modernization or against a surrounding culture that is described as godless and atheistic. This anti-modernism avoids or denounces any communication with those perceived as liberal secularist and with people of other faiths. It is often used to reaffirm traditional gender roles in which the man is seen as the head of the family. But in Christian contexts, too, the anti-modernist stand is eclec-

³ Elizabeth Frazer, "Communitarianism," in Gary Browning, Abigail Halcli and Frank Webster (eds.), *Understanding Contemporary Society: Theories of the Present* (London: Sage, 1999).

tic: while some features of modernization or globalization are rejected, others are accepted, even affirmed.

Cultures during globalization develop in opposite directions as well as coming closer to one another. A whole spectrum of reactions may be identified: from assimilation and hybridization to encounters that generate increasing attempts to develop politics of identity, in which Muslims, Christians, Jews, African-Americans, Hispanics or others stress their "authentic" cultures are still widely made: Muslims use the early period of Islam to reclaim the early vision that was lost in later history,⁴ Christians of various denominations look to the early church and the church fathers for inspiration and guidance.

An interesting critique of such strategies comes from post-colonial thinkers in the third world. Gayatri Spivak describes them as a nostalgic desire to return to an origin forever lost. The assumption that is possible to reclaim a history free of colonialism stays within—and therefore affirms—the colonial logic. Albert Paolini argues that the notions of difference, authenticity and essentialism which often lurk behind constructions of "otherness," are as false as the idea that globalization inevitably leads towards a homogeneous global culture.⁵

Religions

In the writings of Stanley Hauerwas there is a Christian communitarianism that is critical of all theological attempts to engage in dialogue with liberal ethics and its universalist aspirations. Alasdair MacIntyre is the obvious source of inspiration. This discourse also includes fervent critique against friendly relations between church and state.

In the Nordic region Lutheran churches and states have been closely tied to one another since the 16th-century Reformation. Few people today would defend the totalitarian aspects of the close marriage between church and state which emerged but grew stale during the subsequent era of Lutheran orthodoxy. Needless to say, when state and church were virtually indistinguishable, there could be mutual influence and dialogue, but prophetic critic and a distancing of the church from political power were impossible.

The rejection of similar relationships between church and state has been part of European history over the past three centuries. Rémond distinguishes three phases in the disengagement of church and society. The first stage of secularization was carried out under the influence of liberal thinking. Reli-

⁴ Cf. Jonas Svensson, *Muslimsk Feminism* (Lund: Religio, 1996).

⁵ Albert Paolini, "Globalisering," in Eriksson, Eriksson, Baaz and Thorn (eds.), *Globaliseringens Kulturer: Den Postkoloniala Paradoxen, Rasismen och det Mangkulturella Samhället* (Nora: Nya Döxa, 1999), p. 75.

gion came to be thought of as a personal affair. Religious minorities were crucial actors in the campaign to get rid of discriminatory statutes. In the name of individual rights, group rights were expanded.⁶

The second stage has to do with disestablishment. Once a state is no longer associated with one religion to the exclusion of all others, an increasingly marked distinction between religion and society is inevitable. This entails dissociating administrative acts in relation to birth, marriage, and death from religion. Civil administration and registry are set up for all citizens, removed of any religious reference. States must then decide, for example, whether there should be civil marriage only for those who do not want a religious ceremony or for everyone. Should cemeteries have separate sections for different religious groups or a communal area for all?⁷ This process of disentangling is now taking place in Sweden in connection with the separation between the Lutheran church and the state in 2000—but also in relation to new waves of Muslim, immigrants especially.

While the first step in secularization in Europe was the acceptance of confessional plurality, the second stage meant a decisive deconfessionalization of the state and secularization of society. France opted for the more radical solution of creating a single state, the same for all. The two stages there happened in one leap, under the logic evident as early as 1789 with a clear distinction between citizenship and religion. England has remained religious, but “within the framework of a confessional plurality which liberty of conscience brought as an inevitable corollary, the recognition of a certain freedom in the choice of forms of worship enabling them to be placed on an equal footing.”⁸

A third stage in the disengagement of church and state is the form of secularization which has led some liberal states in Europe to a “total neutrality regarding beliefs and a complete withdrawal of the state from this arena.” Taking France as an example, Rémond identifies two systems, challenging each other:

education through obedience versus liberty; submission to the law of the group versus a questioning approach; dogma versus reason, hierarchy versus equality; tradition versus progress: and conservatism or reactionarism versus democracy.⁹

In this phase, religion as such is interpreted as “a permanent threat to the principles and values of modern society,”¹⁰ all references to religion are evicted from the public arena, both the state and civil society.

⁶ René Rémond, *Religion and Society in Modern Europe* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), p. 131; cf. Elisabeth Gerle, *Mångkulturalism för Vem?* (Nora: Nya Doxa, 1999), p. 96.

⁷ Rémond, *op. cit.*, (note 6), p. 137.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

In my view it is here that many states find themselves today, including Sweden. Attacks on the established church and its historic association with the state thus seem to me obsolete. The challenge is rather to deal with the often unconscious understanding of religion as something opposed to democracy, reason, and equality. This challenge, which sets the relationship between religion, ethics, and politics in a new framework, must be faced in an open dialogue with liberal secular society and with people of all faiths. To dream of one single Christian voice speaking to the world with a theocratic, universal tone runs the risk of reaffirming the old stereotype that Christianity is connected to dogma, hierarchy and conservatism rather than to equality and democracy. But it is also important to avoid the Manichaeian trap of seeing everything connected with tradition as bad and everything connected with modernism as good. There are aspects of modernity worth acknowledging, but there are also aspects of pre-modern ways of life and the cosmology that went with it which are worth celebrating also in our time.

It is at this crossroads that we find ourselves in late modernity. While there are precious values of sacredness and respect for the community in pre-modern ways of life, values such as the integrity of the individual, including the individual woman and child, which have been developed in modern thinking, are also important. Critical theory and feminist scholars have taught us that many of those values have received only lip-service and have been connected with hypocrisy and double standards: yet the values in themselves might be quite good and worth a renewed effort of implementation, without the instrumentality to which Max Horkheimer among others has drawn attention.¹¹ In my view, the strong tradition in reformist thought of affirming values that underpin democracy—the right of the individual and of equality—is worth acknowledging. The task for feminist critical theory may not be to repudiate concepts such as autonomy and subjectivity, but to reclaim and reconstruct them to empower women.¹²

In the global arena religions are back as political actors. While Max Weber pointed out the “disenchantment” of the world which modernity brought, “re-enchantment” is an obvious trend in contemporary culture. It cannot be said today that politics is not religious; the challenge is rather to discern the type of politics being pursued by various religious voices.

¹¹ Cf. Max Horkheimer, *Critical Theory: Selected Essays* (New York: Continuum, 1972).

¹² Aileen Hewitt, *Critical Theory of Religion. A Feminist Analysis* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), p. 16.

Culture and Society in the Nordic Region: A Geographer's Perspective

Olof Wärneryd

Your Place on Earth

All places, all human settlements, all human beings have in every moment a location in time and space. This location can be of three different kinds: absolute, relative, and mental. The knowledge of a place and its three locations provides a basis for understanding the situation and the conditions of concrete contemporary human life. This also gives much of the prerequisites for economy, culture, and society. If we also add the phenomena of geographical distribution and redistribution, the analyses may go even deeper. Thus, nothing is equally distributed on the globe or in the world; we have to redistribute different resources and assets for a more just world. International migration, including illegal migration, is such a phenomenon.

Both Peripheral and Central

From the location point of view the Nordic region—Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden—is in an absolute sense located on the periphery of Europe. At the same time Höör, Sweden, can be shown as having a very central place in Europe, also in absolute terms. The axes, east to west and north to south in Europe, meet in the province of Skåne and as Höör is the center of Skåne, the conclusion is that you are in the origin of the European coordinates system.

Besides, the absolute location gives most of the prerequisites of the physical flows occurring between regions and nations. For example, a large portion of all goods and people between the Nordic countries and continental Europe is crossing Skåne, which may in the future be more and more regarded as a transit region.

A sparsely populated region located on the outskirts of the densely populated, powerful center may be considered as a backwash region as is often the case in other parts of the world. The standard of living is high, manufacturing is well developed. Norway is among the richest countries in the world, thanks to its resources of oil. Foreign trade is extremely important, particularly with other European countries. The standard of education is high and the welfare state functioning well. The "information society" has found a profitable plat-

form to develop, and in some areas of the information industry, the Nordic countries are among the most advanced countries in the world. The Nordic countries are not free of problems, facing increased crime, open and latent racism, segregation, difficulties for new citizens to integrate into society, and more. Still, the Nordic region with a total of about 24 million people maintains a rather prominent position in Europe.

Relative location means that you have to consider your position with respect to other places or people. Very often the place, city, or town, receives a rank in a hierarchy and has to cooperate or compete with other cities and towns. While this hierarchy is very stable over time investments in new or improved infrastructure can change the situation. As an example, the Öresund bridge between Malmö and Copenhagen will favor the relative position of Malmö and Skåne.

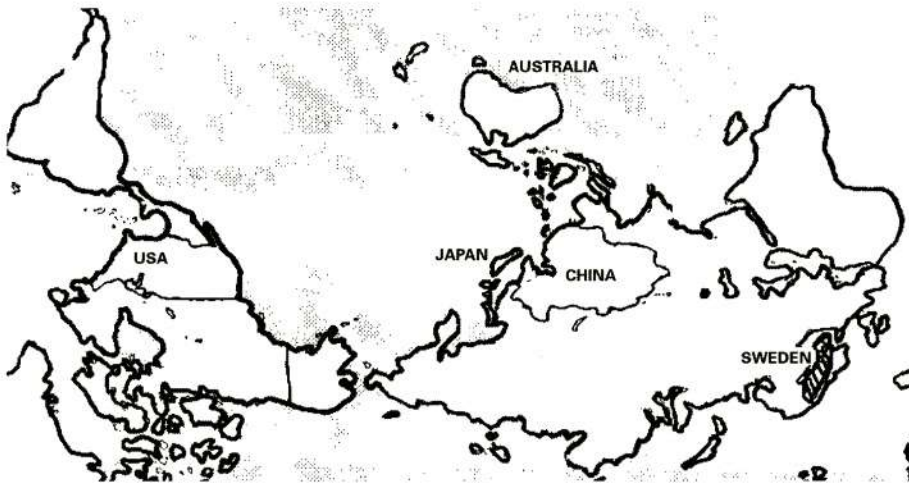


Fig. 1. An otherwise mental map of the world. Sweden in relation to the fast growing regions around the Pacific Ocean. From Dagens Nyheter, 1994.

Another example is the map in Fig. 1. Instead of having Europe at the center of a world map, it focuses on the countries around the Pacific Ocean: the largest growing market. This gives the Nordic countries a different location, relative to this market. The trade between East Asia and the USA has at some periods exceeded the more or less classical trade between Europe and USA. The European Union countries regard this as a challenge that needs to be met with extra measures. The map can also be thought of as a different mental map for us in Europe.

Every one of us has such a mental map of our surrounding. On the map you enlarge the immediate vicinity and reduce the rest of the world with increas-

ing distance. The decreasing knowledge about other areas is more subjective and very often loaded with prejudices and myths. Consequently you ignore the situation in other places—"it is not your business"—or it can prevent you from investing in the area or avoid it as a tourist. It is up to every one of us to work continuously with the content of our mental map by increasing the knowledge and understanding of other areas and cultures.

On the Swedish side, particularly in Skåne and Malmö, people attribute utmost importance to the bridge. The establishment of all other "bridges" are numerous within all kind of fields and interests, including university teaching and research, culture, business, and so on. In Copenhagen the mental map of the Öresund region is much more meager and people do not bother so much over the new stationary connection with Malmö, a provincial city in Sweden, not of the rank as the capital of Denmark, Copenhagen.

Internationalization and Globalization

There are two fairly "new" conditions influencing your place on earth. The first is what we have called internationalization and the other globalization. We have always existed in a more or less internationalized world, if by that we mean processes involving the simple extension of economic activities across national boundaries. It is, essentially, a quantitative process. We have also successively over many centuries become more globalized, by which we mean the functional integration of internationally dispersed activities. Globalization processes are more qualitative.

The gap between the so-called developed and most of the developing countries is not diminishing. On the contrary, it is widening. By the processes of internationalization and globalization the former strengthen their position and power and create a more integrated world.

For most people, globalization means having access to the information flow in the world and that one may be reached wherever one lives or works. Nations, regions, and individuals, particularly in the richest and most highly developed countries and cities, are more and more linked and integrated in global networks. Via the Internet you can be a member of several such networks. The ease with which one can operate the networks has lead to the conclusion that physical distance no longer matters. While this may be the case for those who belong to the information society there are still many people outside the information flow. Also, the more you are involved in national and global networks, the more you must travel around to meet people face to face.

The increased physical mobility of people, goods, and substances is promoted by improved infrastructure, highways, railways, and airports, all over the world. To facilitate both daily commuter traffic and mass transport of

tourists seem to be the most articulated and useful means of creating an integrated world, locally and globally. That we thereby use up limited resources more quickly and cause more pollution is just one example of our contradictory decisions. We both encourage people to travel more and at the same time tell them not to use the car more than necessary.

Internationalization means that the conditions in one's place depend more and more on the development taking place on the international arena. Industry operates on a global scale and a decision made may influence conditions in a lot of other places. We have to take seriously our responsibility and send help to catastrophic areas. The interdependence between different places and regions is increasing and the power of decision making more and more in the hands of the transnational firms or international organizations.

The Nordic Region Today: Population

With the exception of some parts of Denmark and Skåne in south Sweden the Nordic countries are sparsely populated. Most people live close to the coastal areas. In Sweden, for example, half of the population live within 30 kilometers of the coast of the North Sea or the Baltic.

The five countries now experience the same problem as most developed countries in the world: a quickly aging population. Sweden together with Japan has the oldest population in the world. Even an increased life expectancy can not balance the extremely low birth rates. Having had just over 2.1 children per woman in the early 1990s, Sweden is now down to about 1.50 child per woman. To reproduce the population we need a fecundity of 2.1 children per woman. This means that for the first time since the beginning of the 19th century the number of deaths exceeds the number of births. Without immigration Sweden like most other European countries would have had a decreasing population.

With respect to its size Sweden has a high proportion of people coming from abroad. About one in six is born abroad or has at least one parent from another country. As in many other European countries the structure of immigrants mirrors the changing situation in the world. War, both between and within nations, political persecution, environmental crisis, and so on, give rise to migration flows. Of the about 25 million refugees in the world, most are detained in camps in countries adjacent to the problem regions. The rich countries take care of only a small share of these refugees by controlling immigration through definable quotas. Total international migration involves around 100 million people whose aim it is to survive. Integrating these new citizens into our societies is perhaps one of the greatest challenges we face today.

We have become an increasingly multireligious and multicultural society over the last 40 years. The most recent immigrants come mostly from Islamic

countries but those from the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches are also increasing.

Sweden, along with much of the European Union, has a restrictive immigration policy. Almost one in two people arriving in Sweden is immediately denied permission to stay in the country. It is also difficult to get asylum. In 1999 figures around 45,000 immigrants arrived in Sweden and about 35,000 left, many moving back to their home country. In addition, a large group were Swedes leaving to work abroad.

In the 1970s, policy in Sweden changed from one of assimilation to a policy of integration and the development of a multicultural society. Even if there are some attempts to integrate the new Swedes into our work and private spheres, much more remains to be done. There are too many examples of segregation and it is not easy for the new Swedes to compete on the labor market, even if many of them are well qualified.

In economic terms, Denmark, Finland, and Sweden belong to the European Union (Iceland and Norway do not) and as such are extremely dependent on trade with the other EU-countries. Another important partner is the U.S. and the east and south-east Asian market is growing. In Sweden, still, the larger share of exports builds on the classical resource, that is, products refined out of iron ore and wood. Increasingly, export products of the new information

	EARLY 1990s	YEAR 2000
SITUATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stagnation of the economy (not the export industry) • High unemployment(>12%) • High immigration (until 1995) 	<p>Economy never been better</p> <p>4.9%</p> <p>Strict policies</p>
STATE GOVERNMENTAL POLICIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fight inflation • Reduce the national debt • Dramatic cuts in the public sector (less subsidies) • Restrictions to get asylum • More students to higher education (within the same sum of money) • Promote science and technology • Develop an ecological Society 	<p>~0.1%</p> <p>Paid half</p> <p>Still some cuts but hope to turn</p> <p>Even harder, EU-rules</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Ecological society incl. economic, social and cultural dev. (sustainability)</p>
CONSEQUENCES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less money to the households • A fast decreasing fertility rate • Less internal migration • Reduced car sale 	<p>In general more but still some large gaps</p> <p>Lowest ever <1.5 ch/woman</p> <p>Youth leave home for education</p> <p>Increased sale and use</p>

Figure 2. Some changing states in Swedish politics, economy and social life during the 1990s.

technology, (such as mobile telephones), and productions within the cultural sector are attractive on the international market, for example, popular music and sports figures.

The common goal in the Nordic countries is to strive for the welfare state, which involves high taxation. This means free education even at the universities, almost free health care, subsidized child care, and so on. In principle there is an agreement among most people to equalize between different income groups in society. The adjustment to the European Union and its rules will influence some of these conditions.

Dramatic changes have occurred over the past decade.

Some Challenges for the Future

We in the developed countries have to take more responsibility:

- To create a more just and viable world with special emphasis on the problems of poverty;
- to support the integration of immigrants in our societies and to promote a multicultural world;
- to work in the direction of a sustainable society by reducing the use of resources particularly in the developed world and by changing our wasteful behavior;
- to analyze and make decisions concerning the aging population in many of the European countries;
- to deal with the consequences of the fast growing travel and tourism in the world, and the increasing wear and tear on famous places.

The Church in the City

Christina Berglund

The Church of Sweden is an Evangelical Lutheran community of faith manifested in parishes and dioceses. The Church of Sweden also has a national organization. The Church of Sweden is an open national church, which, working with a democratic organization and through the ministry of the church, covers the whole nation.

—An official description of the Church of Sweden¹

Lutheranism has deep roots in the rural context, the small town, the cathedral and university town. Its parishes are set up to meet the needs of a stable farming community. It has a predominantly patriarchal structure. The father was responsible for the family and the priest for the congregation. The king was responsible for the faith of the nation. This pattern is outdated and the parishes must find forms which correspond to a modern way of life and to the city.

Has Lutheranism ever adapted to the metropolis? Have we as the Lutheran church, with the expressed identity as an open folk church, ever seriously questioned our structures in relation to our people who now live in a modern, large-scale, multiethnic and pluralistic society?

Stockholm is the capital of Sweden. That means something for us as a diocese. We must always include a bit of the national perspective while being in touch with international life.

Cultural Life

The city is also a capital of culture. How can we as church, together with other churches and religions, take part in the public discussion in society? We have done so through music, drama, dance rather than the media. During the "culture capital year" we tried to express "life questions" through film, drama, literature, and debate. We followed up with "Jubilate"—a broad effort of various types of music in our churches during a whole year. We took part in the millennium celebrations—our city churches were left open and a dance-

¹ Excerpt from, *The Church of Sweden; A National Church and its People*, Svenska Kyrkan Kyrkokansliet (Uppsala: Church of Sweden, 1999).

drama written by our present bishop, Caroline Krook, was performed in the town hall. In summer 2000 we cooperated with the large open air museum, Skansen, on the theme "The Landmarks of Life." In 2002 Stockholm will celebrate its 750th anniversary. Contacts have already been made regarding our cooperation with the city's department of culture.

The Church and Business

The city is the center of professional life. Although we have reflected on the theme "The church and the world of enterprise," for many years we are still at the experimental stage. The needs and demands are clear regarding cooperation between the church and police, the church and different companies, the church and hospitals, and so on. While in the latter area we have seen an ecumenical cooperation over the last 30 years or so, no stable structures have been found for the other areas. The reason is largely structural and the church needs to transcend its parochial borders.

Another area which only a few individual parishes have been able to address is the ministry to the unemployed. Following the depression of the 1990s the rate of unemployment is currently decreasing, but for the unskilled and many workers around age 60, who were, and still remain, excluded from the labor market, poverty is even harder to bear in the face of the new affluence. Single-parent families are severely hit.

The Commuting City

Most people spend 45 to 120 minutes commuting to work on trains, buses, the underground or in their private cars. Over the past year we have suffered from frequent breakdowns of public transport with 17 percent of all scheduled departures of commuter trains having been cancelled this spring. That is not counting the underground and the narrow track railways which have had frequent disturbances too. As a result people are exhausted at the end of the day, the days are long for children at daycare centers and leisure time arrangements at school. It means that it is very difficult to arrange meetings in the evening and Saturdays are also taken up by sleeping, shopping and cleaning. The church competes over very precious free time. That puts demands on the quality of experiences we offer people in worship and other meeting points. The need for wells to drink out of and rest by is clearly there and some forms of worship such as music, meditations and Taizé masses meet that need, but those forms are still not mainstream nor are they adequately funded.

The Multicultural City

Stockholm is a multiethnic, multilingual and multicultural city. During the 1980s and 1990s large numbers of refugees were received in Sweden. After a few years they tend to move to the big cities, because many originally come from big cities, friends and relatives already live there, they search for jobs and many other reasons. We have five large parishes in our diocese where less than 40 percent are members of the Church of Sweden. The reason for this is not that people leave the church but because they belong to other religions, mostly Islam, or other denominations such as the Roman Catholic Church or one of the several Orthodox churches. Still the parish church is seen as a religious center of the neighborhood and the churches' diaconic work and work among young children is in great demand. One parish has an area where less than 10 percent are members. How do we interpret the task of being a folk church in this context ?

The Segregated City

Over the last decades the segregation in housing has increased. In Stockholm the wealthy live in the city and in the northern and north-eastern suburbs in large flats and privately owned homes. Those with fewer means live in large blocks of flats, largely in the southern and western parts. We have rich parishes in the northern parts of the dioceses and poorer ones in the south. Those poorer parishes have to meet the vast expectations of social workers, and the people who live in the area often have serious difficulties. Since each parish is supposed to be self-supporting and the national inter-parish support system has barely discovered the plight and task of the city parishes, there is little help from outside.

It is important to note that the main problem of segregation is not ethnicity. It is when low income and social deprivation are concentrated in certain areas and immigrants are stuck in those areas that the problems arise. It is most unfortunate that the church through its close tie between membership and finance has limited means to make a strong diaconic contribution to those suburbs.

The Marginalized

The city is also the place where you meet those who have fallen out of the system. We now often see beggars in the streets and on the underground—a new phenomenon which arose in the 1990s. There is rising drug addiction both to amphetamines and so-called new drugs. We have a well established

City Mission (*Stadsmisionen*) which carries out remarkable work, but the link between this voluntary organization and the official church structures, diocesan and parochial, is much too weak. Parishes also have a diaconic, socially oriented, work. There is a growing consciousness that the diaconic task requires the efforts of the entire congregation, but we still have a long way to go.

The Child in the City

There are few children in the city center. 70 percent of all children in the country live with their biological parents. 30 percent have experienced a divorce. In parts of Stockholm (Sundbyberg) that figure is higher (40 percent). Children largely live in the outskirts and are visitors to the city center. About 30 percent of the children in the metropolitan areas live in the poorest parts and of those 60 percent have an immigrant background.

Schools and daycare centers have suffered under tough savings programs during the 1990s, more children in the groups, fewer teachers, less psychological and health care, less cleaning of localities, and so on. The children of well educated parents are taken to museums, theaters etc. This also happens to the large group of children on outings with their daycare center or school. The church which is present in the suburbs has a great chance of transmitting part of the spiritual heritage.² Parishes have an active outreach. They offer visits to the church, where often a crib or an Easter landscape has been built and teachers or priests tell the story and are in dialogue with the children, or through drama and music presentations of the Christmas or Easter message. These programs are usually very much appreciated by teachers and pupils. As far as I know questions have been raised only in one area with a very strong Muslim presence and day care centers therefore abstained from taking part. Sometimes questions have been raised, usually by agnostics. Much of the work among children is carried out by the Church of Sweden since other religions and denominations do not have the tradition of working with children.

The Parochial Structure: A Hindrance?

Parishes of the Church of Sweden are built on the pattern of a parish in a village or small town. There the structure functions well and the church is not only an integrated but often a focal point of the local society. The church

² Cf. UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, articles 17, 32, and 27.

building is a symbol for the identity of the community. In the city the parochial structure functioned fairly well as long as each part of the city formed a real community where housing and places of work were reasonably close and a network of shops and service institutions such as schools, homes, for the elderly, doctors' offices and fire brigades all belonged to the same neighborhood. Today the whole pattern has changed. Shopping is concentrated in the city or supermarkets or is done over the Internet, especially by families living in the center of Stockholm. Hospitals are huge industries in four different places in greater Stockholm, although there are small local clinics. There is a tendency to apply to specialized schools which means travelling from one end of the city to the other fairly early on, and from the age of 16 the system now is such that pupils are very likely to commute already from high school age.

The Holy Hour of 11 a.m.

In this new social structure I would say that the parochial system is a hindrance rather than an aid. Each parish plans its own times for worship as if the church were situated in a country village with no other church within easy reach. We have around 125 places of worship with regular Sunday services in greater Stockholm. Last Sunday 93 of them had their main service at 11 a.m. In the city center 19 main church buildings (including the Finnish and German speaking congregations) had their Sunday service at 11 a.m. Only one, St. Johannes, had an evening mass at 7.30 p.m. There is no common planning regarding the times and types of worship. So far the diocese has hesitated to initiate such cooperation out of respect for the independence of each parish. However, when it comes to work with confirmation candidates and study groups for adults, there is a small beginning of cooperation. One of the aims of the year of church music, "Jubilate," was to explore structures for an intensified cooperation between parishes and their organists across the parochial borders.

Belong Where You Live

Each parish is governed by its own parochial board, elected by church members who have to live in the parish they belong to. The new church regulations make no provision for modern pluralism, for the wish of people to belong to a parish with a certain type of worship of the parish where you have your holiday cottage and where you spend most of your weekends or a parish where the music tradition suits you and you have chosen to belong to the choir. People in the city just cannot understand the church's lack of flexibility. The

risk is that they leave the church altogether if not given a choice. You have to belong to a local parish in order to belong to the church. This spring we have had several telephone calls a week on this issue.

Responsible Partnership

The solution, I think, is not a hasty breakdown of the existing structures nor a joint venture, like the bureaucratic system we had when all the new churches in the suburbs were built in the 1950s and 1960s. But I do think that forms of responsible partnership between parishes in cooperation with the diocese need to be developed. For the immediate future we also need a financial support system, which meets the needs of greater Stockholm more quickly and effectively than the national one, which has only discovered the city as a source of income. I also think that alternatives to the territorial structure on the basis of interest of belonging to some particular group or area should be explored.

The New Church Ordinance (*Kyrkoordningen*) and the Financial System

According to the new church ordinance, the parish is responsible for carrying out the task of the congregation. It is defined as worship, education, diaconic work and mission—in relation to all of those who spend their days within the parish boundaries, not only for those who live and are registered in it. This puts a strain on those parishes which have big hospitals, universities and colleges, prisons, or single big employers. To some extent the central church foundation through the dioceses has a system of supporting financial means for such parishes, but not nearly enough to correspond to the increased demands. Likewise, the parishes in the archipelago register a dramatic increase in the population during the summer months and there is a great demand primarily for baptisms but also for weddings, and all year round also for burials, at least interments of urns, at the place where people feel that their ties to the Swedish church are strongest.

The Parish in the Church Ordinance is a Country Parish

On the whole the new church regulations are planned from the perspective of parishes outside the three big city areas, Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmö. There are few provision for corporation across parish boundaries. One exception is in the so-called parish instruction where one point refers to cooperation between parishes as regards staff.

Lack of Strategy

At the same time it is obvious that what happens in the city areas of Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmö is decisive for the future of the Church of Sweden and indeed for Christianity in Sweden. But there is no national strategy which addresses this fact.

The Task of the Diocese

According to the new regulations the task of the diocese is to further parochial life and to have oversight. It is a matter of dialogue with the parishes. The diocese is also responsible for certain tasks in the education of personnel, in administration and financial matters. It is expressly said in the preparatory investigations that the diocese should not carry out direct pastoral work on its own. That leaves the question open as to how the many over-reaching tasks belonging to the whole area of church and society should be undertaken by the diocese in a city area.

The Financial Solidarity System

I have mentioned the financial aspect several times. Members of the Church of Sweden pay a church fee. It is progressively proportional to a person's income. Each parish decides upon the percentage. A national average is 1.13 SEK per 100 SEK. Most Stockholm parishes take out much less, SEK 0.82. This depends partly on differences in the costs of funerals. Largely it is lower both because there are many people in each parish and lower costs per member for staff. But it is also because it is expensive to live in a big city and the tolerance for a high church fee is lower in the secularized urban environment.

Some country parishes take out 1.50 SEK. However, this means that the parishes in the suburbs which have the most exacting task of mission and outreach are those that provide the most money to support country parishes where the tradition of belonging to the church is strong. The criteria for support from the equalizing system is: the number of church buildings, the number of burial grounds, old churches which need special care and, finally, low membership. It means that the other three criteria tend to outweigh the last one. One could say that the care of the buildings and of the dead gets more support than the mission to the living.

Worries

In view of the future task of socializing children and youth into the life of the church and the Christian faith is crucial. Our effort in Christian education

is weak. Educational staff decreases. There are falling numbers of participants in all age groups except in the parents' and toddlers groups which have a substantial increase (in Stockholm 26 percent in 1998). The youth movement is also weak and could be better supported by the adult church. In Stockholm we reach 16 young persons out of thousand aged 15 to 25. The number of confirmation candidates has fallen all over the country, but most dramatically in the cities. However the decrease was halted last year and changed into an increase.

One of the more serious questions is the difficulty in role formation in the leadership of the parish resulting in problems in cooperation. There are many conflicts in the parishes which take away energy from the work and are therefore detrimental to the witness of the congregation.

Signs of Hope

One of the effects of the change in relations between church and state seems to be a new consciousness of identity and an increased responsibility for the life of the church. Over the past 25 years we have developed new forms of worship and new books of worship, and the procedure of renewal is continuing. This, in my opinion, has improved the quality of worship life. Attendance is falling most noticeably in the types of worship that have changed least. We have a living tradition of church and a considerable membership in choirs. There is an openness about difficulties and increased sharing of ideas.

The parishes have developed good outreach to schools and child care centers. The year of prayer, *Rogate*, in our diocese has been well picked up by the parishes and is in line with a longing for deepening of the spiritual life. The work with the pastoral program in the "parish instruction" means a fresh effort in the setting of new goals and objectives for worship, education, diaconic work, and mission in the life of the congregations. Interreligious dialogue is growing and there is good practical ecumenical cooperation.

Conclusion

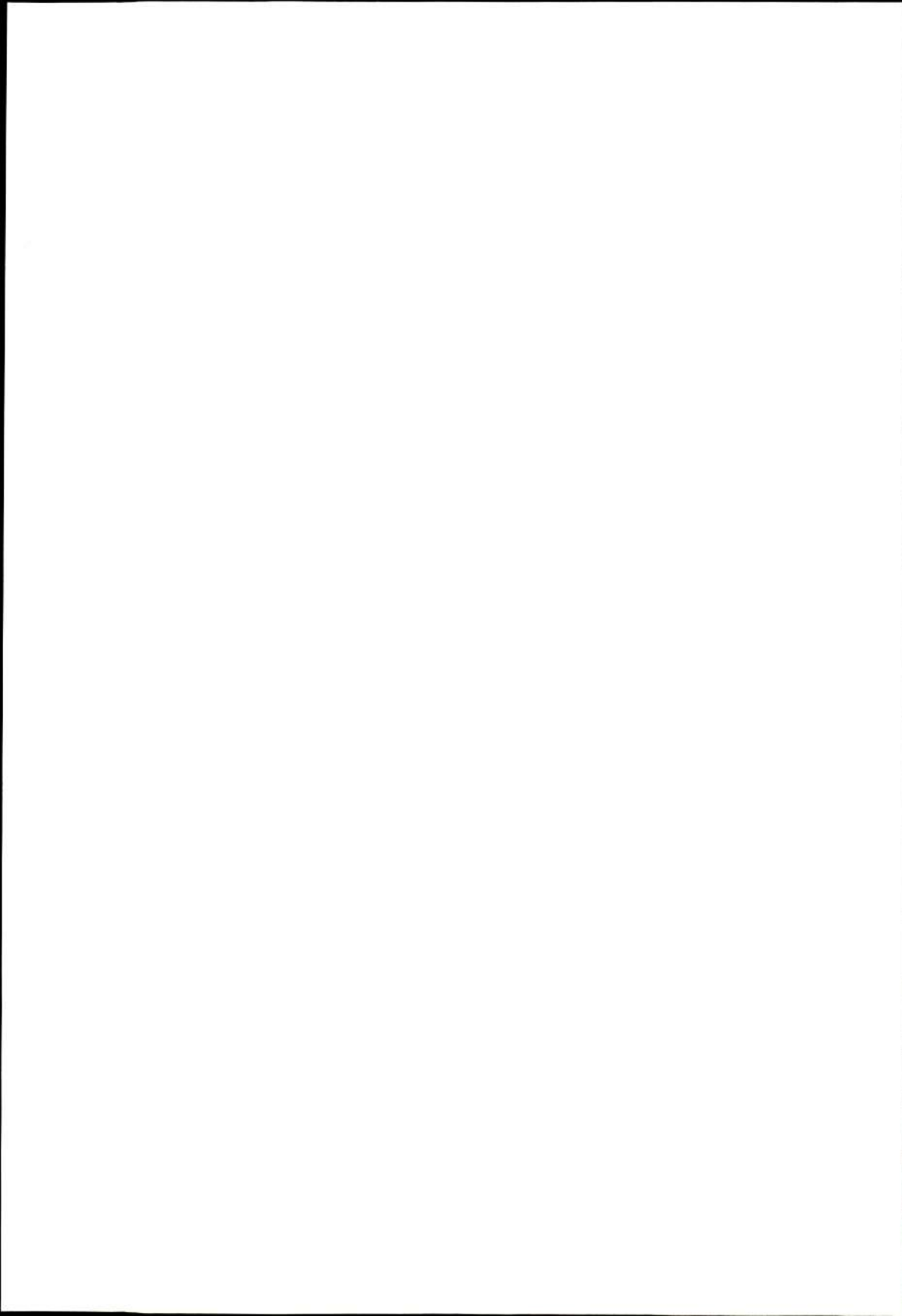
There is a need to leave the one-pattern structure of church life in favor of a more pluralistic one. We need the old parochial structure and most people will probably continue to want to belong to a territorial parish. But in the city there is a need for complementary forms. It should be possible to belong to a congregation which is connected to the place where you work, or where most of your family live or where you spend your summers or which has a special profile, for instance, of social work in the city or some such area of interest.

It has been shown that the more people attend services the more varied the possibilities are. One could expect that a greater freedom to choose the type of parish or congregation you want to belong to would have the same effect on membership. The idea of non-territorial congregations has nothing to do with congregationalism. The bishop would have the same, if not closer, oversight over that kind of community. There is also a need to find more adequate patterns of leadership in the parishes and maybe this need partly arises out of a structure which no longer functions.

There is a pressing need for a strategy of mission particularly to the suburban areas where we lose ground quickly. The aim in the immigrant areas should not be one proselytism, but rather to meet the need for diaconic outreach which is in demand there.

In connection with this strategy more of the finances must be allocated to work in the suburbs. If the Church of Sweden is to fulfill the goal of being of folk church present in all parts of the country—as the law states—that must also include Rinkeby, Kista, Hammarkullen and Rosengård. The situation is such that the diocesan board has ordered a special investigation into the situation in the parishes with a large proportion of immigrants, including an investigation into the possibilities of a diocesan financial equalizing system while waiting for the national level to become aware of the situation.

The importance of a special mission to children and their families and young people cannot be overemphasized. There must also be a dialogue with a diaconic outreach to immigrants. "The problem of the Church of Sweden is not that people are leaving it" one of our sociologists Thorleif Pettersson said already in the 1980s. "The problem is that an increasing number have never belonged." A majority of those persons live in our big cities.



"Give Us A Church We Can All Believe In"

Aud V. Tonessen

About 85 percent of the Norwegian population belong to the Church of Norway. About 10 percent attend service on Sunday once a month, while only 2 or 3 percent attend a service every Sunday.

In autumn 1999 all major newspapers in Norway ran a full page advert with the headline: "Give us a church we can all believe in." The reader was invited to sign a text and thus to support a campaign backed by leading people from politics, finance, literature, and the arts, as well as theologians and church leaders. A prominent Norwegian advertising agency was responsible for the text and overall strategy and the message was addressed to the bishops of the Norwegian Church.

The campaign and, specifically, the slogan, were much debated and heavily criticized. "Give us a church we can all believe in"—what exactly does that mean? Did it call for a church with politically correct values, asked the critics? A church that conforms to popular opinion? Since declared atheists had signed the petition, what kind of church would even an atheist believe in?

There was the suspicion that many of those supporting the campaign were groups that only wanted to pressurize the church into taking stances against its own theological foundation. Many felt that the campaign wasn't necessary in the first place, since the church was providing plenty of space for the discussion on church and gay people. Some also believed it to be wrong to raise this issue of discrimination outside the church's own organs. This was an internal, theological issue, some maintained which should be solved within the church. The church shouldn't be pushed and pressed on this matter from the "outside."

To me this campaign and the criticism of it by key church people highlights one of the most problematic issues when we are discussing *communio* and community within the context of the Norwegian Church. It is one of representativity in the Norwegian Church's organs. Is the *communio* open for every baptized member or has it become an arena for the more or less professional members of the church, who know their way around in the system? With the exception of a few atheists, those backing the petition were baptized and members of the Church of Norway, although maybe not active in the church's official organs. Why did they choose this way of raising their voice on such a delicate and complex issue? Was it, after all, the only channel open to them? Were the church's own channels closed? Theoretically there is

only one kind of membership in the church, namely through baptism you become a full member. But the campaign does raise the question as to whether the church's channels of communication are in fact closed to most of its members, open only to those with special skills, those who know the system.

In more theological terms: there are two types of *communio*. In Norway the *communio* of the baptized is very often a different from the *communio* of people gathering around the altar for communion. The tension between an ecclesiology that understands the church to be all those who are baptized and one that understands the church to be active communion-seeking *communio* is great and of great significance to church politics. Who should decide in the church? All those who are baptized or only those gathering around the altar?

The "Spacious" Folk Church

Hans Gammeltoft-Hansen

One adjective used far more often than any other to describe the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark is the word "spacious." The origin of this expression goes back about 100 years. It first appeared in the course of the 19th century at a time when strong waves of religious revival movements of varying character swept the country. Obviously, a number of the more stable religious groups that came into existence as a result were considering establishing free churches—as happened largely in Sweden. However, during this era in the history of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark, most people made an effort to keep as many of the religious groups as possible within the framework of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark. They succeeded to the extent that today the vast majority of the Danes are members of this church. The precondition was that what the Evangelical Lutheran religious community called the folk church had to be open to substantially differing opinions, not only about the order, functions and tasks of the church, but also about essential doctrinal questions. The folk church had to be "spacious."

The claim of a spacious church was maintained throughout the 20th century, also on a basis different from the original one. In Denmark (like in many other smaller Western European countries) the Socialist movement resulted in the establishment of a Social Democratic Party which for most of the 20th century has been the country's largest political party, and therefore also the party most often in government. A complete separation of church and state was on the Social Democratic Party's agenda for some decades, but the issue was later abandoned. In return the party has since underlined the church's obligation to be open to anyone who has not actively given up the church membership obtained through baptism. Also in this respect, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark was to be spacious and ready to be of unconditional service to its broadly constituted members. This development concurred with the creation of the welfare state; and some people regard the obligations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark in its relationship to the citizen as almost equivalent to the public responsibility for the life and welfare of each individual, some sort of a "church rendering service only." To a certain extent this attitude towards the church's function in relationship to the 86 percent of the country's citizens who are its members today, is explained by the fact that vicars are employed as civil servants and by a certain amalgamation of the church's and the state's finances. To this may be added some

aspects of the structural relationship (the relationship between state and church) which will be mentioned later.

In several respects, the folk church is thus marked by spaciousness, the degree and extent of which is hardly a distinctive feature of religious societies in general. This is one of the reasons why so remarkably different opinions on the ecclesiological character of the church, its functions and obligations within and towards the Danish society, its tasks in the world, the inner life of the church and the congregations, may be found within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark. As already mentioned, the same applies to some extent to doctrinal questions.

There are rare examples of this openness being limited but for instance, a vicar has had to retire from the church against his will because of his theology on baptism, in which there was no space for perceiving and preaching baptism as God's unconditional gift. A layman, a member of the congregational council of his church, had his membership of the church revoked because of his being in favor of a sectarian teaching with reincarnation as a fundamental element.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark from a Structural Viewpoint

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark consists of about 2,100 parishes. Several of them, especially in the country districts, have been combined into joint cures, in total about 1,350, serviced by approximately 2,200 vicars. Groups of 10 to 20 parishes have been combined into about 115 deaneries. Finally, the country is divided into 12 dioceses (of which two are Greenland and the Faroe Islands). In each parish there is a congregational council that holds considerable power over practical, administrative, and financial matters, and has a certain influence on spiritual matters such as liturgy. The vicar is elected, but not employed, by the congregational council. Formally and legally, the congregational council is without influence on the vicar's preaching, administration of the sacraments, and pastoral care.

Nationwide, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark is administered by the Minister for Ecclesiastical Affairs, who is a member of the government, and under whose jurisdiction questions concerning other faith communities belong.

There is no church council or synod within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark. Thus the superior and only national legislative assembly (apart from the Council on International Relations mentioned below) is the parliament, the Danish *Folketing*, among whose standing committees there is also a one on Ecclesiastical Affairs.

The Danish constitution provides that the state shall "support" the Evangelical Lutheran Church as long as the vast majority of the population ac-

cepts the Evangelical Lutheran doctrine of the church. Consequently, the Evangelical Lutheran Church is not a state church in the classic sense, no more than it is a free church.

The government of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark is strange compared with its structure. Democratically elected bodies, the clergy, and state bodies have influence on the church, but to varying degrees. Locally, in each parish, the congregational council in cooperation and concert with the vicar has considerable influence; in each diocese the bishop is dominant, however with a certain participation of the local superior public officer. And nationwide the government is in the hands of the Minister for Ecclesiastical Affairs and the parliament without any necessary participation of bodies chosen by the members of the church, or by representatives of the clergy.

The reasons for this strange structure are mainly historical and political. The discussion about whether radical changes should take place, first of all by introducing a church synod and diocese councils, is in many circles very much alive. These days the discussion especially reflects various attitudes concerning the role of the church in society and to maintaining the above mentioned substantial "spaciousness," which will ensure extensive spiritual freedom without the risk of losing membership of the Evangelical Church (and thus access to its "service").

Large groups within the church (often rooted in the theology of N.F.S. Grundtvig and his thoughts concerning the freedom of the church) find that any form of central national bodies elected by the members of the church themselves should still be avoided. That the government of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark nationwide is in the hands of secular state bodies (parliament and government) is regarded as a sort of guarantee against spiritual captivity (or bondage). More or less distinctly, this conception sometimes appears in combination with an accentuated congregational perspective, according to which the church is no more than the single local congregation. This amounts more or less to a rejection of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark as a community of faith.

Others fear that a national church synod may fall into the hands of church activists, so that a barrier is put up between the active and the more passive members of the church. They also fear that it is going to be the first step to undermine the above mentioned "popular" latitude of the church.

Supporters of a national synod mainly argue that the right to decide in the internal affairs of the church (liturgy, hymnbook, rituals, and so on) should not be in the hands of the secular bodies of the state, first of all the Minister for Ecclesiastical Affairs who does not even have to be a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark. In recent years this argument has been combined with the idea that the church has a responsibility to speak up on important social matters, as, for instance, social politics, unemployment, environmental questions, health care, genetic engineering, and the treatment

of refugees and migrants. In order to raise its voice the church needs a body representing the church in its totality.

It is, of course, not argued that the gospel contains final, specific answers to the questions dealt with by a highly developed and complicated society. It is nonetheless stated very clearly that the evangelical perspective should not be missing from society's debates and decision-making processes. Some opponents will argue that this is not a matter for the church: others, will say that it may be a matter for the church, but that it should be left up to the individual to speak, not to the church as such. One often hears the latter argument expressed as follows: "Nobody can speak on behalf of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark, but everybody can speak for themselves."

In the vacuum one might say that is ruling nationwide within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark, where the church members as such are without representation, the 12 bishops in the country play a prominent part.

Summing up one could say that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark contains congregational, episcopal, and synodical currents. The various attitudes are often connected with the spiritual and democratic broadness of the church, with the questions concerning a self-governing church and with the conception of the involvement and the responsibility of the church towards a number of important societal questions. The picture is so diverse that centers of gravity or main currents cannot be pointed out.

By way of suggestion, however, two aspects could be identified. One is that very few explicitly admit to be supporters of a more episcopalian church. This characteristic of the Evangelical Lutheran church is of a more factual nature (as said also because nationwide there exists a sort of ecclesiastical vacuum within the structure of the church); in spite of this most members of the church regard the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark as a "church from below." The second aspect is that in the last decade there seems to have been a tendency towards a strengthening of the synodical view. However, it is impossible to decide whether this is a prevalent tendency, or whether it is another pendulum swing in the debate on church government of the last 150 years.

The Diaconical Work of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark

The diaconical work of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark is carried out in part within the framework of each local congregation, and partly through church organizations mainly extending voluntary work.

The diaconical work within the congregations varies according to the geographical position and the geographical structure of each parish; of course the most targeted effort to remedy and relieve social distress takes place in

the larger cities, first of all in Copenhagen. A considerable migration from country to town during the second half of the 19th century created a working class proletariat, especially in the capital. Extensive church building took place concurrently with the division of the parishes; and at the same time organized care for the poor and parish *diaconia* developed in many city parishes.

With the development of the welfare state in the decades following World War II, the demand for direct and systematic poverty alleviation in the congregations decreased. The tendency within diaconical work has now taken two directions, partly aiming at relieving non-material demands among the many elderly and lonely people in the urban population, and now also among the middle-aged groups a considerable number of which are unemployed. Moreover it aims at alleviating social casualties such as the homeless, alcoholics, the mentally sick who are not able to or do not wish to accept the offers from the public welfare system.

One will find people of a theological and eccesiological persuasion that opposes the voluntary church organizations on account of the way in which these organizations work and the theological foundation and the ecclesiastic culture they represent. This resistance is rooted among other things in a distinctly congregational attitude towards the church. Such a point of view does not, of course, affect the diaconal work carried out locally by each congregation.

Another theological viewpoint gained quite substantial influence in the first half of the 20th century in its reaction to any kind of visible piety. The preaching of the Word and the recognition of the human being as being bound in sin were considered all that was necessary and legitimate; any kind of church activity was suspect of justification by deeds. The positive sides of this theological movement continue to have a considerable influence on the preaching while the negative sides, their exaggeration and extreme polemics, have in recent years only been held by a narrow circle of theologians. This circle, which seems to associate with rightwing extremist political parties, quite often voices itself in public debates where it manages to evoke a response, not least in the political debates on refugees and migrants. The work of voluntary church organizations or single parish congregations working with these groups and in other politically sensitive areas will continue to give rise to controversy also within the church itself.

In 1989 the prevailing order was adopted through a statutory provision on the participation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark in ecumenical and interchurch work. Accordingly, a diocesan committee for interchurch relations is elected in each diocese. This consists of four laymen, two vicars as well as a bishop, responsible for interchurch relations of the diocese. Each diocesan committee elects one member to join the Council on International Relations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark, which together with the bishops is responsible for interchurch work.

Simultaneously, the Danish Council of Churches was created in which, in cooperation with the still existing Danish Ecumenical Council, direct contact and dialogue between churches in Denmark takes place.

Internally, interchurch cooperation manifests itself in ecumenical worship, mutual church visits and meetings, as well as other social activities; externally, mostly through participation in the work of international ecumenical organizations.

Since the 1970s especially there has been a heated debate on the participation of the church in interchurch and ecumenical work. It cannot and should not be hidden that there are a number of opponents and, even more, skeptics within the church regarding the ecumenical movement. At the same time there are also distinct and active supporters of the participation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark in this work.

Until the act of 1989 the opponents fought not only with theological, but also with legal weapons, maintaining that the bishops did not have the jurisdiction to enroll the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark in international organizations. In a strictly legal sense, this may be justified. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark can only be authorized and obliged by parliament, in other words, through legislation or warranted by law. However, it was not taken into consideration that, indirectly, this might have been the case also when the parliament adopted the said appropriation for the interchurch work of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark in 1925. Moreover, since the act of 1989 this question has been beyond doubt.

Much more interesting than the legal subtleties are considerations why there has always been a comparatively strong anti-ecumenical wing within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark.

Simplifying somewhat one can, for instance, point to the importance of Søren Kierkegaard's existence and influence on Danish Christianity. His view of an individualistic Christianity does not give impetus for a spontaneous openness to the concept of *communio*. N.F.S. Grundtvig and the church movement that carries his name has had an even greater influence on the more common or popular understanding of Christianity in Denmark. Perhaps even more so for his successors than for himself, Grundtvig's combining Christian aspects with aspects of "the people" and national aspects has for larger parts of the folk church tradition and its awareness led to a certain lack of openness which in its more extreme form assumes the character of self-sufficiency. It could also be expressed in the way that the congregational attitude is transmitted to the national level; to the church people in the small, homogenous country Denmark only the congregation "in the parish of Denmark" counts. The debate that took place prior to the rejection by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark to join the Porvoo Declaration bears witness to this attitude.

Yet the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark also counts many supporters of interchurch work to which may be added a considerable group of

what might be termed the "tolerantly passive." Hardly anyone is unaffected by the factors and the traditions which were attributed to Gundtvig and Kierkegaard. In view of the still existing opposition to the involvement of the Danish Evangelical participation in international interchurch work it is hardly surprising that the church is not really eager to pursue the concept of *communio*, but participates for reasons of a theological-dialectical commitment.

***Communio* and Church Reform: Models in German Lutheran Churches**

Günther Overlach

Introduction

Rapid changes in society have brought about a crisis in the German folk churches (*Volkskirchen*) which demands that they adapt to the new situation. For years, various models of church reform have been discussed and tried out. In what way can the ecclesiological concept of *communio* make a clarifying contribution in this situation?

Social Background

I believe pluralization and individualization to be the most critical factors at this stage. They create a climate of desolidarization, isolation, polarization, and conflict in our society. While there are counter currents, such as self-help groups and social networks, the question is whether these will be strong enough.

It is in this type of society that the church lives as a *communio sanctorum* as we confess in our creed. In light of the dangers mentioned above we must ask ourselves in what way the church as a community will have to change in order to remain attractive and to offer hospitality and a place to feel at home.

A Folk Church in Crisis

As an institution our church is still a folk church. The vast majority of the population continues to use its services, it is financed by church taxes and has close links to public services. However, at least half of the church members have very weak links to their church and the active nucleus (*Kerngemeinde*) is much smaller.

Whereas I shall be focusing on the crisis of the folk church, mention needs to be made of the fact that there is also plenty of life, dedication, spiritual growth, and a remarkably wide representation of society in the church. Nonetheless, weak identification and losses in church membership are signs of a crisis affecting the church, as indeed many other organizations. Its public significance and acceptance is dwindling. The church is regarded as one among others on the religious market. Uncertainty regarding the content of faith has

got hold of many of those working full-time for the church and therefore we have to speak of a crisis of church workers.

On top of these problems affecting the heart of the church comes the steady drop in revenue from church tax—the financial crisis. This has led to a crisis of organization. In other words, the church is forced to reform its structures, a move that questions the traditional principle of serving in every place. The church boards are not prepared for crisis management. A crisis of orientation, even a crisis of faith, can be identified as basic problems. Because of the pluralism within the church there is some controversy regarding according to which ecclesiological approach, which aim, and with which methodology the reform of the church should be carried out.

Since church reform has been the main issue in our churches for years I have chosen to apply the concept of *communio* to this topic. Which clarifying contribution can the guiding idea of *communio* make in this situation? Does it help to develop ecclesologically sound criteria of reform which can be agreed on? Or would it rather obstruct pragmatic reforms by bringing in theological categories far removed from reality and practical possibilities of the churches?

Five Main Aspects of *Communio* as Criteria of Church Reform

In light of how the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the World Council of Churches define themselves (WCC) I shall take as my starting point an understanding of *communio* that comprises the following five inseparable aspects:

- Church as *communio* is *congregatio* (*Confessio Augustana* VII), a tangible community of people gathered in a congregation to act together (Acts 2:42). In my opinion this aspect is highly relevant for our churches, as our society suffers from a growing loss of commitment, isolation, an inability to commit oneself, and virtual communication.
- However, as *communio sanctorum* the church is not a mere community of human attitude, but rooted in the shared participation in Word and sacrament, and in the Holy Spirit (*communio in sacris*) (1 Cor 10:16). It is a fellowship in confession and worship (*leiturgia*). This is its particularity, which sets it apart from all other human communities. Considering the crisis of orientation and faith in even the innermost circles of the *volkskirche*, this point is of great significance today.
- Church as *communio* is a community of witness (*martyria, missio*), passing on the good news to all human beings.
- The church as *communio* is a community of sharing (2 Cor 9:13), an instrument of God's compassion and justice—a community of service (*diaconia*).

- The church as *communio* is a community of communication, since the common faith needs continuous tradition and consultation through all ages and across individual and cultural differences. This too is an important aspect considering pluralism and a growing secularization.

The concept of *communio* is manifold in itself. Depending on what one wants to stress, it offers starting points for different ecclesiologies and concepts of reform. Already in 1983 the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD) summarized the five aspects of *communio* into two complementary components of a dual strategy: Spiritual *concentration* and missionary *opening*. I believe this double strategy to be an appropriate summary of the two main directions of reform. Under the present conditions of fading religious tradition and pluralization the aspect of communication deserves high priority in both approaches. A concept of *communio* is therefore only helpful as a criterion if the five respectively two aspects are held together in a balanced way. Yet, in our situation I think the specific emphasis should be on the aspect of spiritual concentration as a corrective.

The *De facto* Pluralism of Ecclesiologies and Approaches to Reform

In Protestant folk churches there is a plurality of different ecclesiologies and corresponding concepts of reform. Without claiming to be thorough, I will name the most important ones.

- The active nucleus of the congregation stresses the first aspect of *communio* with real contacts and a high degree of identification with the congregation and a tendency towards a narrow milieu. The concept of reform is to bring as many people as possible into this nucleus, or more generally, strengthen the local parish (perhaps at the expense of other forms of being church).
- The second aspect of *communio* is stressed by the small group of "high church" representatives. For them the *communio in sacris* is the crucial starting point. All church reform has to start from listening to the gospel, from worship and the sacraments.
- The second and third aspect is stressed by the pietistic sector of the church: "The church as the fellowship of those consciously confessing their faith." The approach to reform is seen in missionary concepts of building up parishes.
- A rather small minority prefer the concept of "being church for others," particularly the marginalized. They clearly stress the fourth aspect mentioned above: *communio* as sharing. Accordingly church reform has to start from the mandate of serving and sharing, based on a thorough analysis of society.

- The understanding of the church of the distanced majority of church members could be defined in the following way: "Church for us" as an enterprise serving them at important turning points of life. With regard to the aspects mentioned above the idea of blessing, of participating in the holy is somehow in their minds. Regarding church reform this group mainly demands client-oriented adaptation.
- The approach "church for all" proves to be the one accepted by the majority in the folk church and is explicitly expressed by the church leaders. Many congregations are guided by this concept, although in fact they never live up to its expectations because they exclude certain parts of society. If understood properly, the aspect of mission is the driving force behind this approach. In our situation as a folk church this leads to an opening reform concept, with *communio* as communication by all means into all milieus of society. Against this background we can understand the inclination to adapt to market economy approaches.

I believe that it would be best to implement church reform as a well-considered, balanced reformation of the church in accordance with the five aspects of *communio*. Yet, for the governing church boards, financial pressures turn the actual plurality of reform concepts in their churches into a big problem. Should they define their own priorities, or should they trust the power games within the church (their market, as it were), hoping that the best ideas will prevail?

I think that all our efforts to gain public acceptance will be in vain if people do not feel that in the center there is a community of believing witnesses (the aspect of *martyria*). I believe that the campaigns of evangelism, though broadly laid out, would run idle, if in the center into which we invite people we cannot communicate the gospel that is understood (the aspect of communication), and if they cannot experience a feeling of home and community (the *congregatio*-aspect) and of participating in God (*communio in sacris*). I think that in our society which is characterized by growing loneliness and loss of commitment the aspect of spiritual and tangible concentration should have priority—in the framework of a double strategy—over opening up to the public which is also necessary. What we need are oases of feeling at home, where we do not have to be successful or impress others, but where we know we are accepted and can accept each other as God's children.

The Evangelical Program for Munich¹

As a first step of the "Munich program" of the Lutheran church, certain involved theologians defined the task of the church. It was agreed that this brief description serve as a broad and suitable basis for the work of the folk church. This is what they came up with: "To share the good news of God's love and justice with people today in word and deed." Here we find three dimensions, namely proclamation, responsible action and experience of communion.

The vision of the mission of the Lutheran church in Munich was formulated on this basis. The Lutheran church in Munich is an important church—

- in the life and faith of all its members;
- for the motivation of its co-workers;
- for the ethical orientation of society

The *status quo* was examined on the basis of the above paradigm. The analysis revealed an increasingly negative cycle. Implementing this vision is hampered by internal conflicts about decision making because of the lack of an overall concept; external problems; and so-called societal megatrends, such as the age constellation of the German population and increasing unemployment due to globalization of the labor market.

As a result, an agreement was drawn up. In order to meet present and future challenges, all employees (salaried and voluntary) in the Munich church must affirm the following three-fold "Yes" to—

- faith as the core competence of the church;
- the development of the church as institution;
- professional methods.

In other words, the church should primarily deal with faith to which all congregational activities should be related. The church requires rules, regulations and structures in order to fulfill its task. Nonetheless there must be space for constructive criticism which is a valuable contribution to renewal. And the significance of the gospel should be reflected in the level and quality of what the church offers. Both are expressed in the attention given to and respect shown for the individual for whom the church exists to serve. Dilettantism is contrary to professionalism and an expression of disrespect.

¹ Excerpts from a text published in 1998. The program was first developed for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria in 1995. It is a reform concept that seeks to make the church more attractive and meaningful for urban society.



Lutherans in the Ecumenical Setting of the Catholic Metropolis

Hans-Michael Uhl

The Italian and Roman-Catholic Context of the Church and Congregation

Fundamental decisions pertaining to the ecumenical situation are taken in Rome, the center of the Roman Catholic Church. It is quite obvious that the Roman Catholic Church observes itself and the rest of the Christian world from the Roman and Italian perspective. Many questions of importance to the Protestant churches only arise in passing, if at all, in this Roman context; they are of no importance in the situation of a Catholic majority. From the Italian or the Vatican's perspective it is a lot easier to cling to the Catholic worldview and to reject external questions, even from Catholic circles, along with the necessity of change and transformation.

On the other hand, Italian Protestantism is marked by an historical marginalization which has extended into the present and created a profound distrust towards the Roman Catholic Church. The persecution and exclusion Italian Protestants have suffered for centuries, and which continues to persist in some areas of society, deeply mark individual and collective awareness.

It seems all the more important that in the form of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Italy (ELCI), and particularly through its Roman congregation, a portion of historical Protestantism is present which—coming itself from the situation of a national, culturally influential church—can raise its own questions and positions with confidence and experience. This also strengthens those forces within the Roman Catholic Church that raise socio-ethical and ecclesiological issues close to our own. This supports the various small Protestant groups in Italy that are reinforced by the integration of the Evangelical Lutheran Church into the Italian and Roman context.

In our experience, despite the small numbers that the Lutheran church in Italy can muster, its presence is significant and Lutherans enjoy a certain affinity, precisely in Roman Catholic circles. We are seen as an historical church in close liturgical and theological proximity to the Catholic church, and precisely for that reason as a serious critical corrective. Emphasis is repeatedly laid on the special importance of the dialogue with the Lutheran churches and there are certain expectations regarding the Lutheran influence on the ecumenical dialogue. That is why there are invitations to appear on Catholic

radio and television programs, coverage in the printed media, and invitations to give papers and talks and to attend a host of public events.

The worldwide ecumenical movement can be set in motion again only if something changes in Italy and Rome. For that reason it is of particular importance for the Lutheran church to have a substantial Lutheran presence in Italy and Rome. Visits of representatives of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and national Lutheran representatives are therefore vital. The natural, everyday presence of our church in the Italian and Roman context is indispensable. It can be heard and approached. It represents the LWF, so to speak, as it has likewise, for a much longer period, represented the German Protestant churches that are members of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD).

Prospects for Missionary Action

In 2000 the ELCI synod dealt with the topic of mission in ecumenical responsibility as a task laid upon us by our Lord Jesus Christ. In this context dialogue was seen as a term of central importance. In essence mission is basically an incessant quest and struggle for dialogue, in which we bring our theological profile into the Italian context. In other words, nowadays it is less a matter of converting people to Lutheranism and seeking a mass influx into our church, than about bringing home the gospel as we understand and live it, and about offering a spiritual home to those who are spiritually homeless.

In Italy the ignorance about everything related to the Reformation and its churches is pervasive. Mission therefore begins with "literacy work" regarding the basic concerns and structures of our church. Next, it is about theological conversation at the congregational and church leadership level and also of theological training. Finally, it involves advising individuals on personal questions. This may lead to individuals finding their spiritual home in the ELCI. It is primarily critical Catholics who, at least for the present, feel excluded or marginalized by their church who become members of the church for a limited period only. Most of those who turn to us are young adults between the ages of 25 and 35, who have the courage to try new avenues. Older people attend worship, seek a conversation with us, but remain loyal to the church into which they were born. They are nonetheless possibly willing to allocate their church tax to the ELCI. Only thus can we explain that, with our 7,000 registered members (maximum), over 40,000 Italian tax-payers give their church tax to the ELCI.

Naturally the Lutheran church is mainly appreciated because of its cultural tradition. Spiritual concerts, exhibitions, lectures, and such are highly appreciated in Italy, as is the culture of Lutheran countries in general. Cultural Protestantism, a concept that is not very much appreciated in our circles,

takes on a downright missionary character in the Italian context. The founding of an Evangelical Lutheran academy in Italy, as discussed at the last synod, would be a good, logical move.

Exemplary and Symbolic Action

The personal and structural facilities of ELCI in Rome are, of course, much too small to cover the whole country. It is once again a matter of making our contribution in Rome and Italy focused, exemplary and symbolic.

By way of example, I would like to mention the annual Reformation celebration on 31 October in Rome. Since its reintroduction it has been very popular and deliberately takes the form of an Italian-medium, ecumenical event. The signing of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification in 1999 meant that the Italian Catholic Bishops' Conference sent high ranking representatives to this joint occasion. The opening of a Philipp Melancthon exhibition on 31 October 2000 was an opportunity to reflect together on this date for which Protestants is so momentous. Bishop Walter Kasper from the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity gave the keynote address. The other Protestant congregations participated, as they did previously. The 31 October date has an increasingly established place in the Roman calendar of events.

In a church particularly characterized by "marriage migration," and above all by the situation of women in the Italian context, special importance is naturally attached to women's issues. For example, in the interconfessional groups of "*donne straniere*," that is of "foreign women," the social roles allocated to women are questioned in joint action by the "welcome" and the "less welcome" foreign women, those from the "first" world and those from the "third" world. The Women's Network tries to overcome the North-South divide in Italy and to bridge the language gap between congregations. Women mostly living in bi-national, bi-confessional marriages are encouraged not to deny their identity, including their church affiliation, and to bring their cultural heritage into the raising of their children. Naturally they also discuss topics that are taboo in Italian churches, such as church weddings for divorcees, homosexual partnerships, and family planning, which in Catholic Italy is talked about in society but hardly ever in the church.

The school and social center of the ELCI on the Gulf of Naples can nonetheless still be seen as a model. In an environment characterized by high unemployment and crime, this center provides vocational and artistic training for young people from difficult social backgrounds, and leisure programs for older people.

In liturgical and homiletic practice it is important to encourage the joint preparation of ecumenical prayers, services, and liturgical forms, still unusual

in Italy. Seeing that altar fellowship is not yet possible, we practice a "communion of the Word." For example, at the ecumenical ascension service in the ELCI congregation's Church of Christ, all participants are given "word hosts" to take home. These were distributed by Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox clergy in a joint act replacing the eucharistic liturgy. Or there is the Protestant presence at the adoration of the cross on Good Friday in the basilica of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme and the presence of Cistercian priests at the Protestant Easter night celebration with the appropriate consequences for the liturgy.

The aim of all these endeavors is to document the naturalness of a shared life of the confessions, the naturalness of the many-faceted church of Jesus Christ—upstream of theological dialogues and compromises, and in the center of the Catholic world. We want to bring in Protestant concerns and perspectives, to experience and understand the spirituality of other confessions and so to locate the barriers that exist. In a context in which the question is still often asked as to why Protestants do not simply return to the fold of the Roman Catholic Church, since the present pope is so open and willing to dialogue, it is important to demonstrate the logic of these many faces of the church.

It cannot yet be taken for granted that Italians and those at the heart of the Catholic church are willing to engage in a "culture of dialogue." This must be fostered at all cost. It is our ministry, our responsibility to help with this, and it is possible even with the restricted resources of a small church.

Toward a Theological Understanding of a Lutheran Ecclesiology in Slovakia¹

Igor Tomo

This turn of the millennium finds us at a time of complex transition for our church and nation, as external economic, political, and social pressures create considerable instability in Slovakia. Like the children of Israel journeying through the desert of Sinai, from the tyranny of Egypt to the freedom of the Promised Land, some of us long for the alleged securities of the former days and for leaders who will tell us what to think. Others of us see the necessity of new relationships to the West, but have little taste for the excesses of consumerism and individualism that we see accompanying these relationships.

In this context, our theology of the church must be centered in Luther's *theologia crucis*, the theology of the cross. For us in Slovakia, this means that we base our life and mission as the church not on being big and powerful, as size and power are measured by secular standards.

Our "theology of the cross" does not, however, excuse us from the hard work of coming out of the isolation of the previous decades. The ecclesiology that grows out of a gospel-shaped faith equips us to find creative ways of nurturing the laity to deeper faith and more responsible stewardship of gifts and more practical connecting points between Sunday worship to weekday vocation in family, work, and community. Here is the motivation for building up our fellow believers, so many of whom need catechetics and pastoral care. Here also is where we find the creative imagination for fresh methods of mission to many of our fellow Slovaks who hunger for depth and meaning in life.

As a further comment on our ecclesiology, we call attention to the uniqueness of the name we have chosen for our community of faith. We do not use the word "Lutheran." But following what we believe Martin Luther himself would have preferred, we identify ourselves as Evangelicals of the Augsburg Confession, since the gospel of Jesus Christ is the basis of our lives. The Augsburg Confession represents for us a standard for the correct interpretation of the Bible. We are the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession (ECAC). We remember that the Augsburg Confession was written as a document seeking reconciliation and unity in the divided Christendom of the early 16th cen-

¹ This presentation was prepared by Július Filo, Ján Holčík, Adrian Kacian, Miloš Klatík, Kristian Kostecký, Dean Lueking, Štefán Paulíny, Ondrej Prostředník, Igor Tomo, Elizabeth Yenchko.

tury. Our very name, then, calls us to focus not on our organizational and institutional formation, as though the forms of church life were the essence of ecclesiology. Instead, our ecclesiology seeks to bear witness that we are an evangelical movement within the Body of Christ, exalting God's gospel as the dynamic center of all theological dialogue, God's Word as the source of faith and the norm of the life that we confess and share, God's Holy Spirit as the power for vision and strategies of *diaconia* and mission, both in our tradition as well as together with other Christians.

Distinctive Church Characteristics and Our Relation to Society

As the largest minority church body in Slovakia, the ECAC is rightfully grateful for its role in shaping the religious life and cultural development of Slovakia, often as "the voice of conscience." Whenever and wherever our church has put its strong gospel-center into practice, there has been the leaven of a progressive and liberating spirit. But we also need to remember the compromised discipleship of Lutherans in high positions during the Communist regime—a problem we have yet to confront openly historically. Our church members are consciously "not catholic," and welcome quality rather than quantity as the hallmark of church identity. The problem of a negative definition of one's own identity represents not only an obstacle to the ecumenical movement but also to our own internal church renewal.

Differences in Theory and Practice, Differences in Ecclesiologies

Democratic methods of church life are rare, due to past customs and experience. Despite our belief in the priesthood of all believers, most congregations are over dependent on clergy, and clergy know too little about equipping the laity for leadership. We are secure in basing our ecclesiology on the symbolic books of the Lutheran Reformation; there is no disputing of this basis. In general, we understand the ecclesiology of the traditional churches in Slovakia.

Communion, in the Sense of Community of Believers

Individualism is a strong tradition among us, deepened by over 40 years of isolation (from other churches and between congregations) under Communism.

What main issues are currently under discussion? Among them are mutual recognition of baptism with the Roman Catholic Church; mixed marriages;

church state relations; religious education; stewardship; recovering the Evangelical *diaconia* from its 40-year ban under Communism; youth work; more efficient church structure; strengthening theological education; ministry of deacons in the church; and the efficiency of pastoral duties and mission in relation to the present church structure.

Main Social Issues, Conflicts, and Dynamics

These might include the instability of political organization; poorly managed economy; corruption in high places as well as ordinary life; entry into the European Union and NATO; human rights issues; a brain-drain to the West; and societal transformation.

How is the church dealing with them? There are many examples. Some include increased publicizing of current social/political issues; ministering to social needs (for example, recent help to partner Slovak church ministering to mothers and children in war zones of Vojvodina); and the beginning of a new training program for laity at the Bible School in Martin (125 enrolled in September, 1999; 75 were expected); the Mass Media Evangelization Center publication of songbook and religious materials, individual parish efforts to minister to the Romany minority (for example: *Slavosovce*), and church representatives sitting on ministerial advisory boards also help the church to deal with these problems.

Weaknesses include a lack of qualified people at all levels of church life; clergy suffer work overload; lack of finances; insufficient strategies for fighting negative aspects of Western culture; shortage of know-how in dealing with church and social issues in general.

Russian Insights: The Church as a Spiritual Home

Anton Tikhomirov

As a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia and Other States (ELCROS) one realizes that it exists not just in society or in a state but also in space and time. Distance and time are of great significance for our church. Our congregations are so dispersed throughout the whole territory of the former Soviet Union that our church has that character of a diaspora church. For instance, the church magazine published in St. Petersburg reaches its readers somewhere in Siberia only some months later. Dozens of previously unknown communities that have existed in full isolation in out-of-the-way villages were "discovered" during the bishop's trip through his diocese. Space and time are not abstract philosophical categories but things, which strongly influence the life of our church although certainly not in and of themselves.

Archbishop Georg Kretschmar says that in an evil world our communities provide a spiritual home, a spiritual shelter for their members. The world is evil not because it says so in dogmatic textbooks, but because people do not receive even their tiny salaries or pensions for years, because they suffer from wars, because they have no medicines, because they cannot visit their relations who live in other regions of this huge country. It is no wonder there is a strong stream of emigration to Germany, which has taken away many former members of our communities. Therefore the concept of community as a spiritual home does not only state a fact but to no small degree sets our agenda for the future.

This is especially important because of society's attitude to our church. Many people in Russia use the definition "Christian" only when they speak about the Orthodox Church. Other confessions are considered sects, dangerous Western organizations that want to destroy traditional Russian spirituality. Sometimes one comes across a more respectful view of Lutheranism but in that case our church is regarded as being the "German church," as part of German national tradition. So, the interpretation of our church by the general public is based on these extreme definitions: religious but suspicious sect or respectful but ethnic German church.

There are also different trends in the inner life of our church. Despite an openness towards all ethnicities, as is declared officially, many of our believers do not distinguish between religious and ethnic principles. Unity among members of our church has come by leading a relatively cloistered life for centuries, or by the merciless persecution during Soviet times. For other members the Lutheran church is an element of German national culture, which

they would like to recapture in full. Some of our new congregations have therefore developed on the basis of ethnic communities.

Accordingly, one of the keenest topics in our church is the discussion about a common worship language. For many of our members, German has become a kind of "sacred language." It is sanctified by the suffering, which the people had to endure because they spoke German. It is not only the language of liturgy, but also the language of the hymns, which had been rewritten secretly by hand. Now this language has become an obstacle with regard to our church's openness to Russian society. There often exists a language barrier between the youth and the elderly members of the German congregations. While every community is trying to solve this problem in its own way, there is a general tendency to use more Russian or other national languages during worship. There is another difficulty: the majority of the leaders and many pastors come from Germany, and thus German is their mother tongue.

Another, more painful, discussion in our church is the argument about the ordination of women. This matter has its own roots in our church. There was and still is in some places a lack of men who are able to lead worship. Women in our communities have become more active in serving the church. This was not a feminist or theological issue for us but a matter of the survival of our church. While many of our communities accept women as preachers and pastors easily and without any doubts others are strongly opposed to women serving in the parish.

We furthermore need to deal with pre-Revolutionary tradition. Here I am referring to the complicated, thoroughly formed structure of the established church which should have been changed long ago. Some of these changes were implemented just after the Revolution, but tragic events prevented them from developing naturally. We cannot simply return to that former status now but the fact that such a church has existed is an important element in our self-understanding. Our archbishop's presence at the burial ceremony for Tsar Nicholas II who had been the official head of our church was very significant.

There is another, completely different tradition in our church. A special ecclesiology has been formed in "Brethren communities." Issues of church structure and law have almost no meaning for the successors of the *ecclesiola in ecclesia* tradition. A lot of these congregations avoid state registration on principle. They have very few, if any, youth or even middle-aged members and therefore little confidence in the future. Their memory is of an almost cosmic catastrophe, which was experienced in the days of exile in Siberia from the Volga region in 1941, and inevitably led to a sort of apocalyptic feeling among their members. There is a demand to pray, to repent constantly, and to live an especially religious life. This causes isolationism or even dissidence. Nevertheless, generally the majority of such congregations want to be part of the larger church community. Church leaders from this Brethren tradition, for example, the late superintendent N. N. Schneider, have done a lot to further this aspiration.

We are excited by the worldwide cooperation of Lutheran churches. It is especially important for us. In some respects we are dependent on help from abroad, because of our extremely small membership and the church's lack of financial resources. The support of our sisters and brothers from all around the world and our good contacts, make us feel that we live in God's love, that we are not lost, nor isolated in space and time.



Prioritizing Education in Estonia

Tiit Pädam

Over the course of the last few decades, Estonian society has undergone dramatic political and social changes affecting society as a whole and therefore the institutions that operate within society. The present moment therefore can be described as a period of transition. Many structures whose existence had long been taken for granted need to be reorganized or be given a new role and many of society's values need to be reassessed.

In terms of how the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church (EELK) regards its own position, we can describe the church empirically from two aspects. First, there is the position of the church in society as seen from the outside. The EELK is the largest church in Estonia, with a network of approximately 170 congregations spread evenly throughout the country. This structure of the parishes has developed over the centuries and has remained unchanged in the last half of the 20th century while Estonia was part of the Soviet Union. The Soviet period was characterized by considerable demographic changes and developments which the church was unable to go along with. As a result towns that were created or which grew substantially during the Soviet era either have no church at all or just one in the traditional town center. In addition, sociological research has shown that, unlike the general pattern in Europe, in Estonia it is the people who live in towns and cities who are most active in church life, rather than people in the rural areas. This means that the church must think seriously about its missionary work and also about setting up new congregations.

Seen from the inside, the church is currently facing some sizeable challenges. The church has been given almost all the previously lacking opportunities to be involved in proclamation, social, and diaconal work as well as education and training. Unlawfully expropriated land and property have been returned to the church and this now needs to be administrated, despite the fact that, in many respects, the church has neither the necessary structures nor the necessary competence to do this.

The situation is paradoxical. Until World War II the EELK was the established church with 82 percent of the population as members. Understandably, the church is no longer in this position. Nonetheless, in people's memories and the collective memory of society, the church lives on in its former prosperity as an institution which can be relied on, which can be turned to when in trouble and which bears some responsibility for the well-being of the people. The Lutheran church is still the largest church in Estonia, but with

the difference that now only 10 to 15 percent of the population are members. 80 percent of the population does not belong to any church or association of congregations. Yet, society still traditionally expects the church to give clear and ethically justified answers to many of today's social problems.

As a second characteristic, it is essential to analyze the church from the point of view of mission and to attempt to describe its functions in society. The very presence of the church issues a religious and existential challenge to society. This is expressed in the way in which the church proclaims its beliefs and also the various ways in which it is becoming more visible in society. It also presents people with the means, symbols, and language to deal with existential problems, religiosity, belief, and God, and to express them in everyday life.

The central event of church life in Estonia is each congregation's Sunday service. Although the church has many other areas of activity, it is the Sunday service that attracts the most people. It is also the single most characteristic factor of the church, its communion, and its unity. Funerals have an important role to play too, as it is there that the church meets the greatest number of people and in this way reaches into their everyday lives.

Here are some of the challenges faced by the EELK:

- To change from a confessing church, which the EELK was during the Soviet period, into an established church once more, and to emerge in society.
- To clarify its institutional character and structure, and to reorganize its administrative structure in such a way that its institutional structure does not hinder the necessary competence from being used in the rebuilding of the church and of society as a whole.
- To cross the town-country boundary, both in terms of the church and socially. No new congregations have been formed nor new churches built in towns and cities where the population and the occurrence of social problems have substantially increased over the past decades. The result of this is that, on average, there is one member of the clergy for every 25,000 people in towns and cities. (In rural areas it's lower, with one clergy for every 200-5,000.) This does not enable the church to serve the population as it should.
- To bring new competence into the church. When the church was freed from the restrictions of the Soviet period, there was an immediate need for new areas of work which while meeting the requirements of the changing situation would also retain continuity in the traditional structure of the church.

Although the EELK has not yet dealt with the question of its theological self-determination, it is trying to define its role in society through areas of activity that assist in stabilizing society internally and in offering hope and spiritual equilibrium to the people.

The first priority is education. It is in the church's interest to educate people who will be able to take on full responsibility for the work demanded of the

church by society and who will be able to perform their duties professionally. For this reason, the church is preparing people for various types of work within the congregations. At the same time, the EELK also trains teachers of religious studies in public schools, as well as military, prison and hospital chaplains, and people who are planning to work in the mass media.

A good example of cooperation between different denominations is the Estonian Council of Churches, which was set up 10 years ago on the initiative of the EELK, in order to coordinate the activities of the various confessions in the rebuilding of society. The organization works well and both the state and the member churches are interested in making it even more effective. At present, the churches are trying to reach a consensus and find opportunities to introduce compulsory religious studies and studies of different worldviews in public schools.

A second important experience for our church has been missionary work to the East, that is to say, the work of the church in the territory of the former Soviet Union. The EELK has founded congregations and missionary stations there and also trained members of the clergy. In addition, in cooperation with other churches the EELK has sent missionaries to areas in Siberia inhabited by ethnic Estonians and other Finno-Ugrian peoples, and the church continues to train further missionaries. Through this missionary work we have developed ties with sister churches in the East and have been forced to see and assess ourselves by criteria other than those we would have otherwise used as a church.

A further essential element in the development of the EELK was its participation in the process of preparing and passing the Porvoo Declaration and its subsequent implementation, with all that this involved. This has been an ecumenical experience, the beginning of which coincided with the changes in the social status of the EELK, and it has been a significant factor in the rediscovery of a Lutheran identity in our church.

The EELK has not managed to get very far with the elaboration of its ecclesiastical ideology in an Estonian context. Nor has the church been able to deal with taking a stand on social issues or with developing a mechanism for giving opinions in the name of the church. We have only succeeded in taking a small initial step thanks to our contacts with partner churches and our participation in the work of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), and as a result of our ecumenical contacts. Geographically, the EELK is situated in the area of pressure between the region's two main traditions—the borders of the Orthodox tradition from the East and the Evangelical-Lutheran tradition from Europe and Scandinavia meet here. It is our opinion that our ecclesiastical ideology should be one of so-called "borderland theology," obliging us to synthesize the ideas of these two traditions for our own benefit. We have to accept different influences, as we are too small as a church to do otherwise. At the same time, this could also become our richness in the development of our ecclesiastical ideology.

We have not yet reflected on the experiences of the last 50 or 60 years. In order to maintain its integrity and its character, the Estonian church must conceptualize its experiences from the past decades, both negative and positive. So far, we have only carried out initial historical studies of a descriptive nature, but the new social situation and our relations with other churches, both Lutheran and of other denominations, are beckoning us towards clearer theological self-understanding and consideration of the church's social role. We furthermore need to answer the question as to how people's attitudes and understandings affect the church and its ecclesiastical self-consciousness.

Hungary: What is the *Proprium* of the Church?

András Korányi

Mission, *diaconia* and education belong to the functions of the church. Of all the church's activities *diaconia* is most in demand. The importance of common action cannot be emphasized enough, although it is the fruit, a sign, of living community of the church as such.

The same can be stated in connection with the role of the church in education. In order to reach a higher moral level in the society, the church is required with its biblical message and tradition to take part in education. Presence in society also means a monitoring (critical and cooperative) function in moral and spiritual teaching. It does not mean conformity but rather critical solidarity.

Nonetheless, the theme of mission as the *proprium* of the church cannot be avoided. Mission cannot be identified simply with re-evangelization because that interpretation would evoke the danger of a "ghetto" of either individual or collective piety. Mission (which can also be communicated to society) must be a dialogue. Otherwise the church goes into opposition to the secularized world. This is a temptation especially for minority churches and the churches in the post-Communist world, where they were on the periphery or completely removed from the life of the society. (That means for example that we have to learn a "vocabulary of dialogue"—expressions of inclusive and understandable communication.)

The Lutheran community of churches and the ecumenical fellowship can help quite a lot. Christians and churches can express their mission in the existing social, economic, cultural, and political structures of life. Our task is to have a critical and loving acceptance of our own context.

Regarding the competence of the church: the theme of identity is deeply connected to the question of competence. There are two aspects of competence that have to be mentioned here. One of them is the mandate God gave to the church—the competence to proclaim the gospel and to share the gifts of God. Existentially it means "being a witness" to God in our everyday context. This is an obligation at the same time and means an "objective" competence. The church has to reach a level from which it can communicate in an adequate, authentic, widely understandable and relevant way. In a globalized world it is impossible for any member of the communion of Lutheran churches to answer the challenges without the knowledge and experiences of the whole communion.

Communion as perspective and necessity: there is no way for separation of the church in a globalized world. Our mandate still comes from God who "so loved the world that he gave his only Son..." (Jn 3:16, and also the significance of the incarnation here). Separation is a deadlock among churches as well. Communion means protection, source of renewal, strength to be inclusive and a richness of identity.

The Lutheran Church: A Minority Church in Eastern Germany

Christoph Münchow

Church in a Changing Society

A theological concept popular in Germany after World War II was the prophetic ministry of a watchman (Ezek 3:17). A watchman, however, has his place beyond society. Many Christians who lived in the Communist East regarded East Germany (GDR) as a provisional exile and West Germany as their political homeland. They wanted to hold out until the storm was over: "How long, O Lord, wilt thou look on?"

In 1961, the building of the Berlin Wall forced the church in Germany to form an eastern and a western region of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD). In this period the image of the traveling people of God described best the situation of churches and Christians in the eastern part of Germany. The regional churches were progressing from their past positions as an established church into the unknown future of a minority church where membership was voluntary (*Freiwilligkeitskirche*). They were looking for an ongoing path for dwindling congregations, fewer full-time staff, and less financial means.

In 1971 the synod of the Church Federation (*Kirchenbund*) pronounced at their meeting in Eisenach the often-cited formula of a church "not beside, not against, but within socialism." This formula caused heated discussions because the church was marginalized. Generally there was no persecution but obstruction.

Christians were marginalized. The social work of the church, however, was the link between church and society. On the other hand in ideological affairs there was no coexistence or any kind of cooperation. Our church contributed to the alleviation of suffering and the transformation of society, but the church was not integrated into society.

Two cities and their Protestant churches in particular have become symbols of the non-violent upheavals that led to the "turnabout" in 1989. In 1982 the Christian peace movement known by the phrase, "swords into ploughshares," started from the Kreuzkirche in Dresden. The Ecumenical Process for Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation also originated in Dresden. The demonstration of hundreds of thousands of citizens in Leipzig in the autumn of 1989 after the prayers for peace that were held in the Nikolaikirche on Monday evenings finally initiated the downfall of East Germany. That turnabout has also been called "the Protestant revolution."

After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Communist regime in the GDR in 1989 everything has changed rapidly, especially the political, social, and financial systems, and the social self-understanding. We were involved in the transition from a collectivist to an individualistic culture, from a monolithic and closed society to a pluralistic society. This is a process of individualization, ideological materialism has changed into economic materialism. There is strong competition in the social services sector and we are faced with modern and post-modern issues, with the power of globalization, with the search for orientation.

At the demise of East Germany only about 20 percent of the population were still members of the church. In Saxony, for instance, most of the one million members were not active by any means. The new social and political conditions did not bring about a renewed belief in God and thus there is no increase in church membership among the population at large. The national importance that the Protestant church attained in 1989 proved to be a political and religious interlude: the atheism which for generations had become a natural way of life under two ideological dictatorships is very deeply rooted. Also, in the new situation we remain a minority church.

Almost 10 years after unification, the minority situation of the Protestant church in eastern Germany remains unchanged. While there are new opportunities for the church to take part in the community life, it is also under heavy pressure to cut costs. From an outside position at society's edge the church has become a factor in the public life of a pluralistic, democratic society. Under the laws governing the state-church-relationship in the Federal Republic of Germany the church in eastern Germany is allotted tasks and functions in many areas of society that it was not allowed to carry out in East German times. In place of obstruction by the totalitarian state they are now bound by a wide range of obligations, such as religious education in schools, church schools, job-creation programs, and ministry for the unemployed, pastoral care for members of the armed forces, pastoral care for prisoners, railway mission, counseling of asylum seekers, and more.

One might expect the churches to react with unbounded joy and make the most of the bounty that has dropped into their lap. Instead we are confronted quite often with an atmosphere of discontent, complaint, and skepticism especially among ministers. Sometimes the new opportunities are seen more as a burden than as an opportunity to make a new start. Step by step, however, Christians are discovering the new opportunities to fulfill their commitment. The diaconal work of church institutions and parishes is increasing. A lot of churches were renovated. The field of church activities has been enlarged.

In truth there is no cause for resignation. My church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saxony's motto is "being a church in the heart of society." We have to end self-marginalization and must not regard secularization as an irreversible fate. It is up to us to make our congregations more attractive, to strengthen

missionary activities as well as religious education and our Christian social service. We have to intervene in society.

Communion in the Church Itself

Oppressive East German times brought Christians together. The state and its organs were the arch-opponents. In a pluralistic society it is difficult precisely to define the arch-opponents. Anything goes. Spiritual and theological pluralism is increasing and there is a gap between the institutional church and the church at the grassroots. There are for instance groups that are afraid of an established church.

It is our task to help parishes and local Christian communities to express in appropriate ways the degree of communion that already exists. We are in a minority, but nowhere else in society is there a community that brings together young and old people, the unemployed and the workaholic, the established and the marginalized.

Mission Today: An Intensive Discussion

Home mission has become a topic for all congregations, since evangelization and mission represent the basic constitutive structure of the Christian church. A new aspect of communion will be added by the merging of home and world mission. The latter was almost impossible in GDR times.

What is needed today is more contact with people who find it strange to ask questions about God. The church in Saxony is seeking to become more clearly identifiable to the non-church-going public. It also involves clarifying the contribution of the church to public life for the cultivation of a human society, because many people have lost hope of attaining a more just society.

Explicating the Eschatological Implications of Communion

The theology of communion that stresses the church as a space of grace has to make explicit the eschatological implications of communion and to reflect on the fact that the church, visible in Word and sacraments, neither lives from nor for itself. It is important not to confuse this eschatological aspect and also to distinguish between the promise of the gospel and secular expectations. We should pay attention to the concept "being a church for others" as well as to the suggestion "being a church with others." It is vital that we criticize, respect, and deepen those secular expectations, for our commitment bears witness to the gospel of God's grace to all people and serves the whole of creation.

Therefore I would like to associate the theological concept of communion with the image of the traveling people of God: "For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come." (Heb 13:14) We should face up to this challenge together, as a Christian fellowship.

Addressing Social Issues: The Church in Alsace and Lorraine

Richard Fischer

Each one of us needs a community in order to live his/her faith, to nourish it with a word from another, and to enrich it with the faith and the experience of others. The church is the community of those who gather and commit themselves in the name of Jesus Christ and who share projects. It is not only an institution which offers religious services to those who ask for them.¹

Life in Communion

While in theory and practice, there is tension between personal piety and community life, they also complement one another. The importance of life in communion is strongly underlined by the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession of Alsace and Lorraine (ECAAL).

Traditionally, in particular in Alsace and Lorraine, church members live their faith with a certain modesty. They express it more through their fondness for canticles and spiritual music than through their enthusiasm for discussion about religious belief. However, concrete commitment to charitable, and diaconal and missionary work is a very longstanding feature. Church life is centered on services and worship, being also marked by joy of being together at meals, parties, and festivals.

Many church members think the church should concentrate on spiritual care as well as on moral and material support of people in difficult situations. There seems to be great reluctance, at least in Alsace, over against the church's public statements on economic and socio-political issues. This came out of a recent public opinion poll, which is nonetheless a little bit difficult to interpret.

Here are some issues presently discussed within the church:

- Increasing right-wing extremism.
- A greater union, if not unification, with the Reformed Church (ERAL), because of the jointly organized diaconal work and church services.

¹ Excerpt from a project description of the ECAAL.

- Strengthening of the synodic dimension and greater commitment of lay members.
- Renewed forms of presence and action.
- Development of transborder cooperation, in particular with Germany.
- Ecumenism, in the broadest sense: between Protestants, between other Christian traditions, between religions, between philosophical and religious traditions.
- The place of Islam (Mosque building projects...).
- Employment, social solidarity and cohesion, bioethics and biotechnology.

There are at least three examples of the ECAAL addressing social issues, together with ERAL: Transborder and ecumenical cooperation; right-wing extremism; and welcoming children and people without (tight) links to the church. We'll look at each.

Transborder and Ecumenical Cooperation

In 1994, a very large meeting gathered over 10,000 people—mostly Protestant—from Strasbourg (F) and Kehl (G). It was called “Two banks, one source,” being organized on both sides of the river Rhine. Those two days gave a considerable impulse to all kinds of regular encounters, meetings, town twinnings, visits, and common action in different fields within the churches. Many lasting relationships and joint activities exist between parishes, such as work with young people, and industrial and urban mission.

At Pentecost 2000, another similar gathering under the theme “With Christ, let's cross the borders!” took place, organized this time by a number of Roman Catholic dioceses and Protestant churches in France, Germany, and Switzerland.

At local and regional level, church leaders from France and Germany meet regularly to discuss questions of common interest such as pastoral care to people from both sides of the Rhine living or working in the neighboring country.

In addition, many sectors of the churches develop links and cooperation with the Church and Society Commission of the Council of European Churches (CEC), through its office in Strasbourg. Thus they're supporting the churches' common effort to monitor the European integration process and participate in it.

Right-wing Extremism

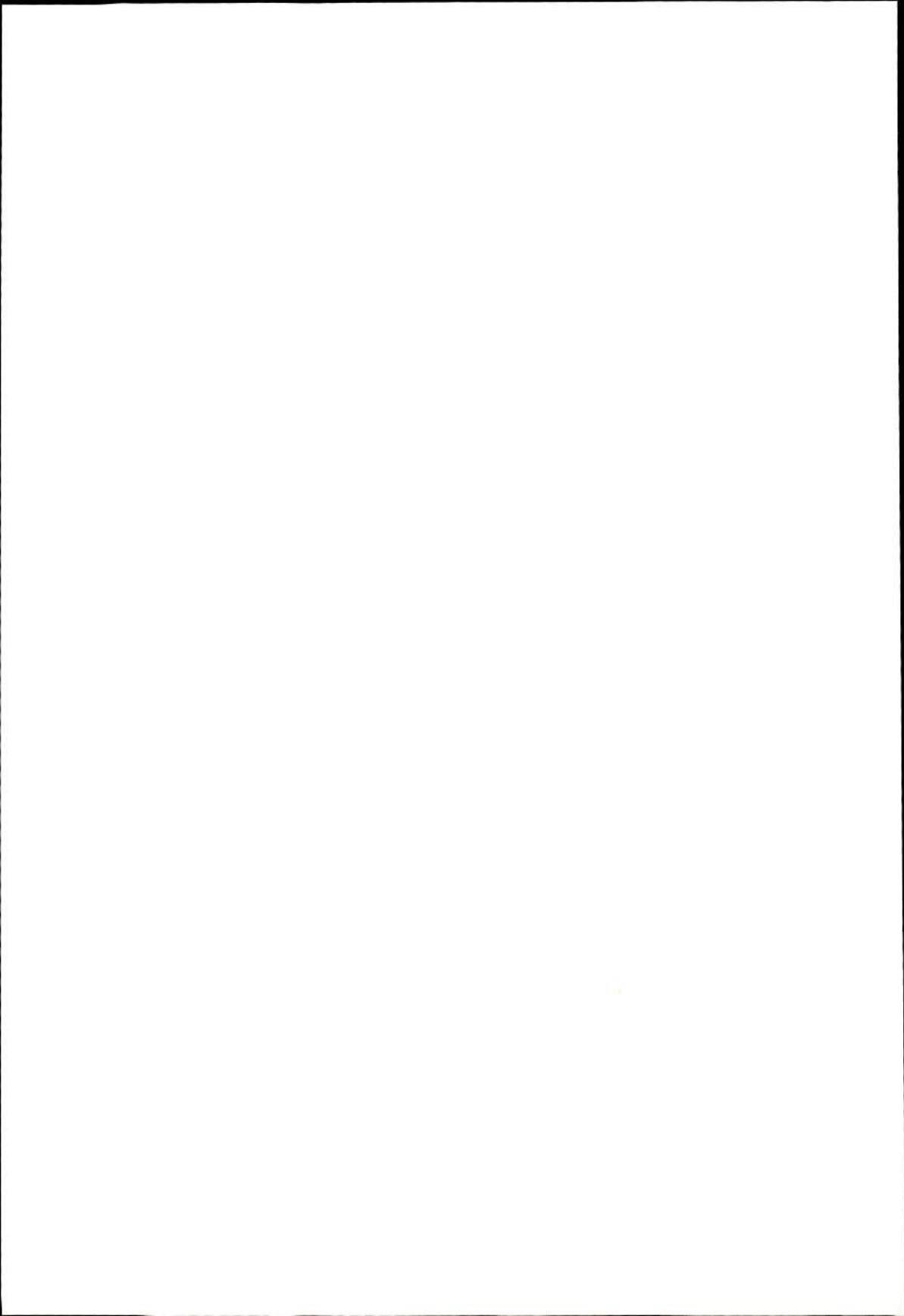
After several elections showing support for the extreme right especially in Alsace, a group of lay people and pastors some years ago created a movement

within the church called, "Understanding and Getting Committed" with the following aims:

- Better to understand reasons for this swing to the right;
- to enter into dialogue with people making this choice, all the more when they are church members;
- to organize debates, training sessions, and symbolic actions (such as fasting, prayer, and silence) as well as interventions in the media and with politicians.

Welcoming Children and People Without Links to the Church

One of the central parishes in Strasbourg, together with all Protestant parishes in the city and several church services, has just launched a project called "Welcome to Children and Parents." Its aim is to create a dynamic to reach those who are far from the church, in order to help them to discover meaningful perspectives for them in the gospel. It is not directly religious teaching, but it offers a framework for activities where, at a given point, children will be able to enrich their experience by encountering a witness from the biblical tradition. For parents, it is a space where they are welcomed, where they may be accompanied and share with others a moment of their lives reflecting on fundamental questions linked to education. They may also start a personal spiritual process. It is a place where the church wants to be open to the whole city in a new way. This project belongs to a wider background of attempts by the church to be more present in urban realities.



How to Be the Voice of the People

Günther Overlach

In an address in May 1999, Dr. von Vietinghoff, president of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hanover, evaluated the ongoing reform in the church.

Von Vietinghoff stressed one point in particular in his talk, entitled "Between theoretical vision and everyday standstill: the reform of the church of Hanover on the middle way." In contrast to too precisely defined images of the church, he is concerned about the aim of activating people of all milieus and mentalities to escape from "sectarian narrowness." He talked about a "folk church with a future" which "is alive in the midst of the whole breadth and tension of reality."

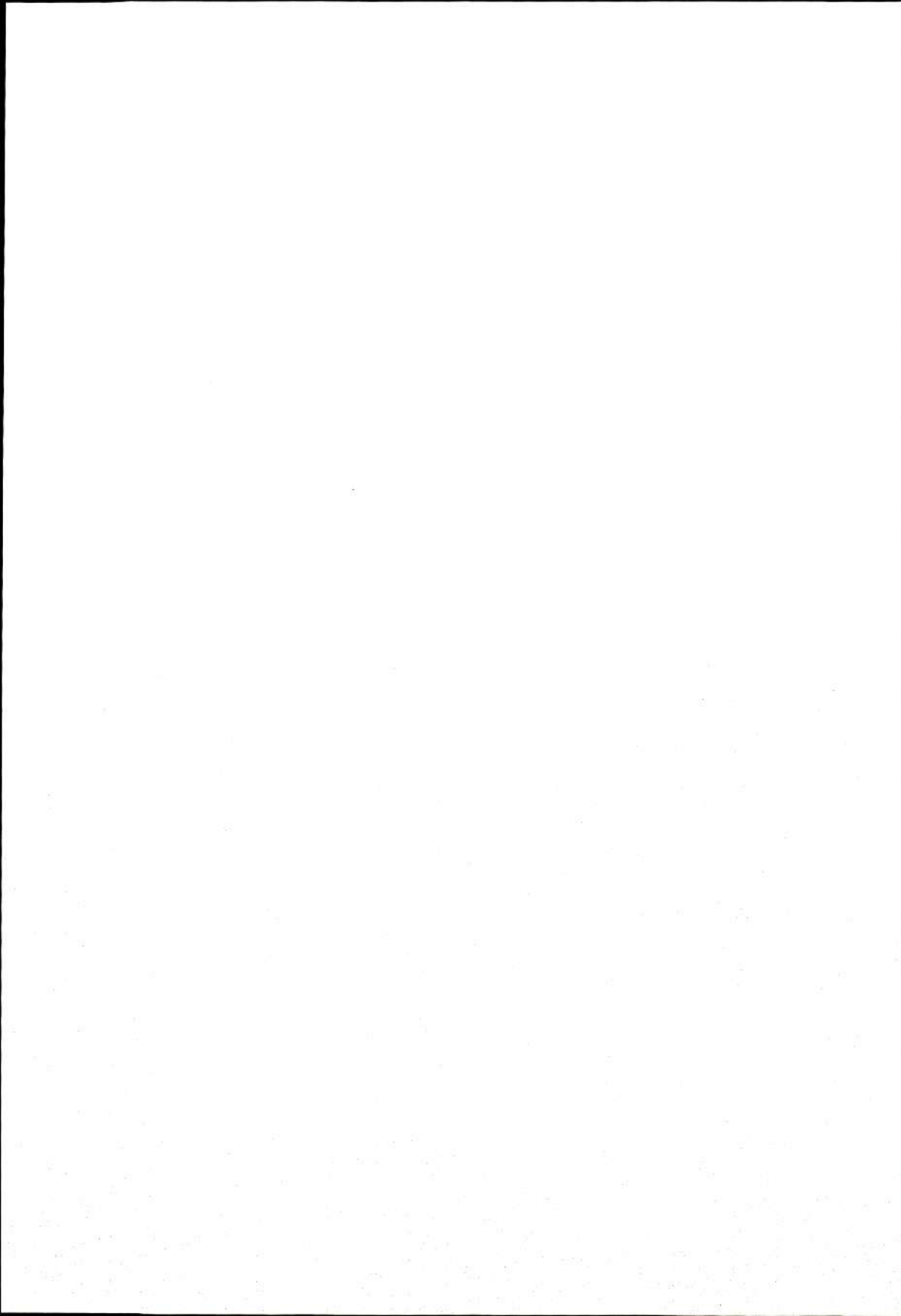
"Only if the church is a mirror of society," he said, "will it be able realistically to perceive the challenge of our time to reach people where they are."

Compared to this goal the reality of the church is marked by two deficits—by a general limitation of its milieu and especially by the alienation between the church and demanding, younger, critical, technical and functional élites. The most important questions to guide the reform of the church are the following:

- How can we regain social diversity within the church?
- How can we reach people who are particularly demanding, particularly "awkward" and particularly critical?

Why this last group? "Because the general climate of acceptance, public interest and sympathy which is essential for the church's influence and stability is probably determined much more by the functional élites than many think."

Von Vietinghoff underlined that we have to accept these challenges in order to influence the church and not merely to adapt to the *zeitgeist*. This does not imply supporting those who have influence, the powers that be. On the contrary, the gospel always runs counter to the *zeitgeist* and therefore cannot subscribe to the spirit of our times uncritically. Nonetheless, it can only be an effective "church for others" or "voice of the week" if it reaches as many people as possible. Therefore von Vietinghof clearly stated that "the church can only be a contrast to the real and imaginary inherent necessities of this world—and it must be aware of this—if it is in this world."



Who or What Defines the Church? The State, Ethnicity, or the Market?

Karen L. Bloomquist

The church has often been thought of in terms of a ship. This is an especially apt metaphor in Europe, where there are quite different kinds of boats in the large fleet of Lutheran churches. They range from luxurious ocean liners to small lifeboats. Some are spacious enough to carry the whole society, especially in the Nordic countries. Others provide a distinct minority kind of witness as very small boats in countries where other churches dominate. Some have served as lifeboats, quietly throwing out lifelines to those in need, especially during times of persecution under Communism. They now seek to discern what it means to be the church in much different times, but still tied strongly to ethnic (especially German) identities. Some of the ships that are docked at the harbor seem so heavily laden with traditions and structures that they may get stuck at the bottom. Others are anchored so lightly theologically that they easily drift in the changing currents of society. Many are so focused on trying to anchor the boat—or secure its identity—with the result that little attention is being given to venturing into new waters of mission opportunities around them.

Amid these significant differences, *who* or *what* defines the Lutheran church in Europe and determines what it does? Although one church (in Slovakia) presented its self-understanding in ways that were explicitly grounded in confessional understandings centered in the Word and sacraments, otherwise this was mostly left implicit or taken for granted. In the case of Sweden, the faith as expressed in the life and worship of the church was highlighted, with the implication that the hymnbook is what defines the church. The once-for-a-lifetime reception of the sacrament of baptism was also emphasized as defining the church and who is a member of it. But throughout the consultation, the Word and Holy Communion, as continual means through which God is active in the community of the faithful, were seldom raised up for explicit attention. The gospel as the animating core of the church was hardly ever the focus of discussion. Whereas in North American churches, for example, baptized and regular communing membership criteria are important in determining who is a part of the church, all that seems to matter in most of these European churches is baptism.

Instead of these and other more recognized focal points of a Lutheran ecclesiology, three themes have been prominent in the European regional consultation: the church's relation to the state, to ethnic identity, and to the consumer market.

Relation to the State

In most of the presentations, the changing relation to the state was a major topic. Given how closely Lutheran churches in Europe have been related to the state throughout most of their histories, this is not surprising. At one point it was even suggested that the crisis of the state system is a Lutheran crisis. The influence of Lutheran theology, filtered through the Enlightenment, has influenced northern European societies to assume a strong state role in caring for all.

In Denmark, the agendas of the church and of the state seem to be almost the same. Here the ruling state party has underlined the obligation for the church to be open to anyone who has not actively forfeited their church membership given through baptism. The state expects the church to be spacious and tolerant of a wide spectrum of views and beliefs.

The European regional consultation was intentionally held in Sweden, in order to get a sense of what differences, if any, the new church ordinance was having (such as the "detachment" of the church from the state). Although this development was viewed positively, with hopes for a livelier mission of the church in society, it was too early to discern what real differences this change in governance might have. In the Norwegian context, the tension between the governance of the church by the General Synod and by the parliament was raised and continuing discussions as to whether church and state should be more separate. In a number of these countries, church, state, and society ("the people") have been nearly synonymous, but where there are increasing immigrant populations and declining finances from the state, this is changing quickly.

In contrast, in Lutheran churches in countries previously under Soviet domination, there have been dramatic shifts from being viewed suspiciously by the state to a much warmer relationship. Here the state now expects churches to carry significant responsibilities in society, even though they may have quite limited capacities and resources to do so. In a 1990 Hungarian state document, the church's important roles in society are delineated, including "fostering national identity." Attitudes previously projected toward the state now tend to be turned toward the church as an institution, with suspicions about its amassing of political power. The challenge, as seen from the Estonian church's perspective, is to move from being a confessing church under the Soviet era into an established church that can more effectively meet society's expectations. In Russia, in contrast, the Lutheran church is still eyed suspiciously by the Orthodox Church, and seen as "the German church."

A paradox is that both too close a relationship between church and state, as well as a strict separation of the two, can lead to a disturbing privatization of religion. It is striking that the highest authority over some of the churches still is the state, at least in symbolic ways. There was little evidence given of

the church being a transforming minority or "salt" in society. When the church is mostly a reflection of the wider society, or the handmaiden of the state in carrying out certain services, what happens to its distinctive identity and mission in society? What public roles the churches in these societies will have in the 21st century, speaking not only to state but also to economic power and the wider society, is a question that urgently needs to be addressed.

Ethnicity or Mission?

From Europe have come so many waves of mission fervor, with an impact that is still pervasive throughout so much of the rest of the world. Long-established, influential mission societies continue to provide generously for the support of churches in the South. However, these mission efforts, supported especially by women, are usually not seen as a central aspect of ecclesiology. What was striking was how little this missionary involvement seems to have affected these churches' own self-understanding and life.

People from far-off lands such as those previously served through mission outreach have now come to live as close-by neighbors in European lands. In one particularly glaring example in a section of Malmö, Sweden, when the population of the parish changed so much that it was no longer primarily Swedish ethnically, the parish church closed. Yet ironically, it is especially immigrants who are helping Swedes realize how indispensable religion is! European churches face new challenges of what it means to be a church in interaction with people of other ethnic groups and faiths, challenges that churches in other parts of the communion have long confronted, and challenges that were foundational in New Testament understandings of ecclesiology and mission.

In the case of other European Lutheran churches, the mission has been to serve those of a given minority ethnic or linguistic identity within a country where other ethnic identities prevail. As the ethnic identity group that the Lutheran church there has served dies off, assimilates, or moves away, the church there faces awkward questions as to what is their mission there now, especially in the shadow of other dominant Christian churches? What might be a distinctive Lutheran witness in such situations? How might these churches become embodiments of the gospel in ways that cross over and transform ethnic boundaries? How might this also become Good News to those in the folk churches themselves?

We are left with a predominant impression of a church baptizing people into a loose association bound together more by the blood or tongue of ethnicity than by the body and blood of Christ. That may seem an overly harsh judgment, and is certainly not what leaders of these churches want to convey, but it may be what the church has come to mean to most of its members. Has the

power of the Eucharist to challenge and transform the continuing ethnic or national identities—or captivities—of these churches been given sufficient attention? Those who are different from “us” ethnically or racially should not be seen only as exotic recipients of our charity but they become those who commune with us, with whom we are joined together in Christ, the one who decisively breaks down the divisions between us.

Consumer Wants

Many questions have and are being raised about the adequacy of the state or ethnicity serving as the basis for who or what the church is and does in these changing European contexts. Churches here will not be able to rely on these as they have in the past. In place of these, the third option is for the church to be shaped or determined by what people want, by consumer tastes, by expansive market choices. With the increasing hegemony of market thinking throughout the world, propelled by the free choices of individuals, this is not surprising. As stated by one of the German participants,

Germans have similar attitudes toward the church as they have toward trains. They want the trains to be there, even if they drive their own cars, except on Sundays when they want to ride on a traditional steam train that has not changed.

There can be positive aspects to this tendency, if it means that the church will find ways to relate more meaningfully to where people are at today—to their concerns, pains, and joys. In the case of Sweden, for example, there is a need for greater freedom for people to decide to which parish they will belong, especially in a day when “belonging” is less tied to where one resides.

On the other hand, the church can easily become driven by what people want in a consumer marketplace—a church “for me and mine.” “Give me a church we all can believe in” is not just the slogan of an advertising campaign directed to one of these churches; it is an underlying theme in many of them. Freedom has repeatedly been raised up as a high value in these churches. But what drives this freedom? If it is the gospel, why was this not mentioned more readily? Or is this freedom based more on individualism and the consumer market? This would seem to be the case if people think of themselves as being baptized only into a free floating association of individuals, who are joined together as a spacious society rather than as a church. What then drives church reform, or engagement with society? The free game of the market of plural forces turns the church into a mirror of society.

In contrast, if we are baptized into the body of Christ, we corporately become members of one another. The church makes demands upon who we are and what we are expected to do, in a more *communio* understanding of what it means to be the church. Church is not just in terms of what we come to

receive, such that grace becomes yet one more commodity to satisfy our wants. "We are sent to the people, not to the expectations." (Christoph Münchow)

The primary ecclesiological challenges facing the churches in Europe is to find ways of being the church that are not primarily bound up with the state, with a sense of nationality or ethnicity, or with market assumptions as to what people want. Who or what will define what the churches in Europe will be about? How might theological understandings be far more determinative of that in the future?

Priest, Preacher, Servant: A Theological Reflection on the Church in Europe

Vitor Westhelle

Preamble: A Surface Analysis

What I will be doing here could be called a surface analysis. By that I mean I will engage in two basic strategies. I shall first attempt to pay attention to the way in which the Lutheran churches of Europe presented themselves in the context of the European regional consultation in Lund, trying my best not to bring with me any previous assumptions (although I am aware that it is impossible to be completely delivered from all pre-understanding). I am attempting, however, to bracket this conference in order to be able to listen with more accuracy to what was being said within its context. Even more important than what was said is to pay attention to what was not said, and why it did not surface.

My second basic strategy in this study is to focus on commonalities, instead of looking at differences among the different Lutheran churches in Europe. I fully recognize that the differences are significant (and some are going to be mentioned), but the attempt here is to highlight the distinctiveness of the European churches *vis-à-vis* other regions of the world. It does seem to me that distinctive commonalities can be observed and that they are significant in order to recognize ecclesiological peculiarities among the various continents or regions of the world—one of the objectives of this ecclesiology project.

A surface analysis is, thus, opposed to an in-depth analysis, in the sense that it is an attempt to isolate what comes to the surface without inquiring at the beginning what lies behind, or beneath what seems to be the case; and in this gesture it aims at surprising the very subject-matter being inquired. This *quasi* naïveté will hopefully produce some results that an in-depth analysis might not be able to catch, or might dismiss insights that appear to be only superficial but can show themselves to be crucial.

In Search of a Map for European Lutheran Churches

Some years ago graffiti on a wall of the University of Bogota, Colombia, proclaimed: "When we had almost all the answers, the questions changed." In connection with the events that transformed Europe—politically, geographically, culturally, economically, ethnically, etc.—since the symbolic year of 1989,

one could imagine a comparable graffiti saying: "When we had just figured out where we were, the maps changed."

Maps are representations of reality. They are like signs that point to a meaning, to what is truly the case. When they change, what changes is our way of understanding the reality we are in, our perception of it, what are the limits and the borders of what is for us the case. Maps are mostly visual aids that tell us where we are and what the limits are of what we understand "we" to be; therefore they also tell us who "they" are, namely, those on the other side of the color-shaded zone that defines us, our "territory."

I start with this metaphor of the map—this image of a map that undergoes a change—as a way of presenting some of the issues that surfaced in the carefully elaborated self-presentations of the European churches. With this I am suggesting that what is going on in the ecclesiological self-understanding of the European Lutheran churches can be described as a change in cartography. The questions raised in discussions and presentations were not as much "Who are we?" but rather "Where are we?" It is interesting to observe that in comparison to what was the case in other continents or regions which this ecclesiological project researched, the question about the Lutheran (Evangelical, Protestant, respectively) identity never emerged spontaneously; when it was raised it was from the outside, by core-group participants. In other words, the question is not who is the "we," but where is this "we," what are its limits and borders.

The features that were once so clear on the old map have now been blurred. There is a considerable degree of insecurity and obscurity about some "territories" that were so clearly recognized in the past. There is a sense of bewilderment in the use of concepts that not long ago had a clear reference: East, West, capitalism, social-democracy, Communism, Lutheran, Reformed, United, Catholic, Orthodox, confessionalist, pietist, liberal, atheist, and so on. The distinctiveness of these once clear distinctions with their demographics and geographies are no longer clearly demarcated. This is what entered into discussion at the very beginning when we heard about the longing for belonging and the implied sense of displacement in this very longing. Along with this sense of bewilderment, strange and not long ago unthinkable alliances have been noted, as between "revivalists" and "progressives," "confessionalists" and "liberals."

This is then my first observation: in Europe, much more so than in any other part of the world we have studied, the church, the issues raised, and the presentation of the churches were overwhelmingly determined by what I have been calling this cartographic concern, this preoccupation with finding out *where* "we" are, instead of *who* "we" are. The presentations and discussions had, therefore, mostly a descriptive character, hardly a prescriptive or apologetic tone was heard. Demographic data, statistics, patterns of church-state relation, relation to civil society, to the market, to other religions, to

other denominations, to political or ecclesiastical parties, to gender issues, to social classes, to ethnicity—all of these were frequently brought up. This seems to be, at the surface, the common characteristic of churches in most diverse European contexts.

Nonetheless, the deeper meaning is not in what has surfaced, but in what did not. What was not voiced are those things that are normally associated with the quest for identity, such as “Who are we who are here?” or “Where are we going from here?” “What is the goal of our journey?” These were largely non-issues. For example, the eschatological nature of the church was mentioned maybe once or twice in passing, but not really discussed (instead, in many cases, the question somewhat ironically implicit was whether or not some churches will simply disappear from the map). In other words, the major concern was about the church’s location, placement, within society, not about its nature, character, or identity.

Europeans, who first created modern cartography in the 15th century, now reveal a sense of being lost, at least as far as Lutheran ecclesiology is concerned. However, the earnestness with which this sense of being lost, of not being sure about the borders of the territory is taken, is quite impressive. And it seems to me that the eagerness to redesign the map is very much at the center of the ecclesiological pursuits. Different suggestions surfaced, ranging from a proposal to re-traditionalize the church to the other extreme of re-inventing it (in other words, going back to an old map or sketching a totally new one), all in the quest for a place of belonging. In any case, during the discussion issues of location where omnipresent.

It is interesting to observe that in the context of this overwhelming preoccupation with cartography practically no reference was made to the relation of Europe to the rest of the world, except when it was felt that the “rest” of the world, through immigrants, other religions coming to Europe, different cultural practices entering everyday life, etc., is changing the European landscape from the inside. In other words, there was a certain level of global consciousness insofar as the world was experienced within Europe. But really not much of a consciousness of a world that exists and subsists outside of Europe was at all evinced.

Itineraries for an Ecclesiology: How to Travel Without a Map

Whether itineraries are the forerunners of maps or whether maps are pre-supposed for itineraries to come into being is a discussion that has not been settled in the specialized literature. In any case they fulfill different purposes. In itineraries, unlike maps, one does not have to figure out where one is; it is a given. In an itinerary one is originally addressed with a message that tells one how to get from where one is to where one should go. The point is the

trajectory to be followed, and not the contours of the landscape. And this is an important ecclesiological insight. Itineraries are not about location, but how to reach the goal one is supposed to reach; the point is not where one is, to figure the layout of the land, but how to get to where one should be.

There were sketches of itineraries offered in the presentations and discussions, sometimes more explicitly, but often only implicitly. I will present some of these sketches of itineraries as I heard them being presented under three categories.

First, I will mention some images of what the church is, or is called to be, which were operative in the presentations and discussions, thus forming the basis for the understanding of what *communio* means. Second, I will lift up some ways by which we discussed how we become what we are called to be. Here the question is about the constitutive practices of the church. Third, I will try to reproduce what I heard as being the means by which one is recognized for what one is. In other words, the first point is about the being of the church, the second is about its function, and the third about its identity. And in each one of them I will point to a missing characteristic or feature that makes also the European churches, at this time in their history, distinct if compared to churches in other parts of the world.

The Being of Communion

The contemporary and post-Vatican II ecumenical discussion on communion ecclesiology might offer us some guidance, or a heuristic occasion, to articulate models for the self-understanding of the church and particularly of its expression in the European context. The notion of *communio/koinonia*, as it has entered the ecumenical dialogues in recent decades, is an attempt to synthesize three basic biblical images or motifs of the church that aim at expressing the church's Trinitarian foundations. These images are the "people of God," the "body of Christ," and the "temple of the Spirit." Although none of these images was explicitly employed in the presentations and discussions, a number of different theological topics were raised that point to one or the other of them.

References to the importance of creation theology, the grounding of the church in the life of the nation and of its people, the importance of baptism, and even the appeal to the so-called "two kingdoms doctrine" all point to first article type of concerns, which imply an understanding of the church as the people of God. On the other hand, the emphasis on the theology of the cross, on the importance of the resurrection, the stress (occasionally) laid on conversion, the significance of the notion of the priesthood of all believers all these point to the body of Christ motif, which concentrates on second article motifs.

However, what was not to be found or at least suggested were references or even inferences that could point to the image of church as the temple of the Spirit, grounded in third article motifs. When pneumatological references were made they always referred to other groups such as the charismatic movement or the Pentecostal churches. This raises a question that should not be taken as rhetorical, but one that needs to be further examined: is there a pneumatological deficit in the ecclesiology of European Lutheranism? This question requires bringing into conversation some topics that pertain to the work of the Spirit in the context of the third article, which were never dealt with during the European regional consultation. Those topics include, for instance, doxology, the crossing of boundaries (for instance, the Pentecost's experience of communication; Acts 2:7-8), prophetism, and eschatological hope and judgment.

The Functions of Communion

In terms of the church's function, or what does the church do by being the church, there was a clear emphasis on three basic functions as the constitutive practices of the church, some churches stressing one more than the others.

One was the priestly function in which the sacramental and ritual nature of the church was underscored. The importance of baptism was of particular relevance especially for the folk churches. Holy Communion was also emphasized along with pastoral care, which, in part, could be understood as the extension of what the sacrament of penance used to be. The priestly function should not be understood as serving only the internal needs of the church, although this has normally been the emphasis of this vision of the church. Reference was also made to the witness that a highly sacramental and aesthetically oriented church offers to the surrounding society.

Another function that received emphasis was the heraldic or proclamatory function. In this case the verbal announcement of the gospel is central to the self-understanding of the church's work. Contrary to the previous case it is not the priest, but the preacher who is of relevance here. Certainly the impact of Reformed theology and the formation of "union" churches—that have brought together Lutheran and Reformed in many places in Europe—can be felt in this type of church. In this case also, the heraldic function has an internal and an external dimension to it. It can serve as basis for the edification of the flock and it also serves external, missionary or evangelistic, purposes.

A third function that was lifted up can be called the *diaconal* or the servant function of the church. In this case the church sees itself primarily as serving society, dispensing mercy in the midst of a broken world and caring for its own fragile members. Hence this diaconal function unfolds itself also in the

two dimensions observable in the other cases. One reaches out into society mainly through social programs toward the marginalized and disenfranchised. Internally the examples given were primarily care giving for the elderly in the church and children and youth programs. The emphasis on the diaconal function of the church is somehow surprising considering that the confessional basis normally alluded to was *Confessio Augustana* VII (CA VII), where the sacramental or priestly function, and heraldic function is explicitly grounded, but nothing is there as far as the servant function of the church is concerned. Nevertheless, frequent reference to the theology of the cross, and also to creation theology would certainly warrant the claim of a servant church.

Here again, as was the case of a suggested pneumatological deficit in the understanding of the being of the church, it is interesting to note that prophecy, which not long ago was in many parts of Europe regarded as a *nota ecclesiae*, did not appear as a constitutive practice of the church, as one of its essential functions, or even an emphasis. Thus it is not surprising that not much has been said about social justice issues (with the exception of gender related problems) and how the church should address them. This appears in remarkable contrast to the way in which churches in other parts of the world articulated their constitutive practices. The point here is to ask whether we are observing a cultural adjustment or conformity of the church. (This is certainly something that it is hardly original to ask European churches, often over-blamed with charges of *Kulturprotestantismus*. However, original or not, it remains an observation worth noticing, particularly in contrast to the hegemony of "dialectical" theology in the 20th century, with its criticism of cultural adjustment.)

The Identity of the Communion

Although we have called attention to the fact that most of the discussion focused not on the identity of the church but on what could be called its location, when on different occasions the question about identity was explicitly formulated there was a significant level of consistency in the answers given. CA VII was generally upheld as the confessional ground of the church's identity (even to the point of some churches preferring the Augsburg Confession as the symbol, to the epithet "Lutheran," to name the church). But other theological issues were also referred to as indisputable characteristics of the identity, such as the theology of creation, the theology of the cross, and even the so-called two kingdoms doctrine.

It was notable that there were no clear demarcating lines which could allow for a distinct and discrete use of the terms "Lutheran," "Protestant," and "Evangelical." These terms, often employed in an interchangeable manner, carry with them different connotations in different languages, which could explain

the lax employment of them. Nevertheless, some overtones could be heard. The epithet "Lutheran" when used for identification brought with itself a confessional emphasis and was often correlated with the priestly function of the church. When the term "Evangelical" was used (in the European and not the USA sense of the term) it seemed to indicate some pietistic heritage and it paralleled the heraldic function of the church. Historically the more liberal churches and theologies have given preference to the term "Protestant" and so, it seems, it remains. In any case, these were the terms most often used as a way of self-identification.

The traditional (creedal) *notae ecclesiae* were not explicitly used, although it would not be difficult to imagine that they could be easily imported into the language that was employed—but with one significant exception! The identity of the churches, as it emerged in these presentations and discussions, never implied—and much less used—the notion of catholicity, of having universal features. The churches were often defined exactly by their non-catholic characteristics, ethnic and national identities, and concern for location. This is certainly also linked to an earlier observation that the world outside of Europe seemed hardly to exist. As in the case of the being of the church (where we noticed a silence about the role of the Holy Spirit that might indicate a pneumatological deficit, even an institutional stiffness) and then the absence of a prophetic role as a constitutive practice of the church (indicating cultural conformity), here this lack of catholic awareness seems to indicate a provincialism—certainly of continental dimensions, a spacious provincialism, yet still provincial.

Analysis and Perspectives

Where in the World is the Church? On the *Notae Ecclesiae*

Else Marie Wiberg Pedersen

In lectures during the summer of 1932, Dietrich Bonhoeffer pointed to the fact that the church of his time, while wanting to be everywhere, in reality was nowhere. Providing new impetus to a church otherwise totally deprived of its location by either the state or the *bourgeoisie*, Bonhoeffer thereupon in his mantra-like fashion placed the church right in the middle of the godly created world.¹ The very difficulty, he continues, lies in identifying *the* location of the church. Where in the world is the church, experienced and believed, to be found, if we want to safeguard it from being a purely human institution bereft of God's revelation?²

In this short essay, I shall try to point to what in today's Lutheran churches function as the *notae ecclesiae*, the marks that tell us where in the world the church as a *communio sanctorum* (the Apostles' Creed) is to be found.

Historically the church, elaborating on Scripture's variety of pictures and epithets, has always set up such *notae* to designate what the true church is. Thus, a theology on *notae* always arises when it no longer appears as evident what the true church is. The Nicene Creed confesses to the church as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.³ On this ground, the *Confessio Augustana* (CA) defines the *communio of saints* to be the place where the gospel is preached purely and the sacraments are rightly administered (CA VII), simultaneously stressing that this church also consists of hypocrites (CA VIII).

In 1539 when so many claimed to be true heirs of the Nicene Creed's one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church, Luther saw himself forced further to ex-

¹ See Otto Dudzus (ed.), Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Das Wesen der Kirche*. Kaiser Traktate 3 (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1971), esp., pp. 21-23, and p. 25; "Diese Kirche [Kirche Christi] ist Mitte der Welt." (This church [Christ's church] is the center of the world.) According to Bonhoeffer it was essential that the church was not separated from its secular setting or from daily life.

² This is imperative to Bonhoeffer, *ibid.*

³ Old Christian tradition utilized the concept "*nota*" for the marks of the church. With modernity, and not least in the 20th century, German Lutheran tradition began distinguishing between the attributes of the church, the four creedal *notae ecclesiae*, and the marks of the church, either the two *notae ecclesiae* of CA VII or the seven *notae ecclesiae* of Luther. See Anna Marie Aagaard, *Identifikation af kirken* (Copenhagen: Anis, 1991). For the theology history of the marks of the church, see i. a. Gustave Thiels, *Les Notes De L'Eglise* (Paris: Gembloux 1937) and Peter Steinacker, *Die Kennzeichen der Kirche* (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1982).

plicate where this true church, the *communio of saints*, was to be found in the world.⁴ He listed seven visible marks: the Word of God, baptism, Eucharist, keys to absolution, ministry, worship, and the cross—all expressions of the *verbum externum*. These seven principal marks function as a critical standard of the true church in relation to the institutionalized church as visible signs of the God relation (the first table of Moses), bound as they are to the people of God, or the *sancta catholica Christiana*. In his exposition, Luther furthermore, as so often, binds the God relation to human relations by pointing to “other outward signs” of the church according to the second table of Moses, signs that have to do with social life, with our ethos and practice, and that are therefore less secure. The principal seven marks, which must be public in character, are the more secure marks of the church, to be seen and known in and by the world. My question here is whether these marks play a role in the Lutheran churches of today? Are these marks still reflected, and if so, then in what way?

I begin where our ecclesiology project ended, in Europe (in “Wittenberg”) the cradle of Lutheranism, and from there proceed “backwards” through the regions implied in this work to see what *notae ecclesiae* are reflected in the world’s Lutheran churches at the threshold of the 21st century.

Analysis

Europe

On the European continent where frontiers and boundaries have always changed, the churches quite naturally ask the question number one of the fast-moving, mobile-phone-infected modern society: Where are you? Where are we? The churches of modern Europe are now witnessing the move of inner boundaries in the shape of a rapid change from fairly uniform to increasingly multiform cultures, caused by the influx of refugees and immigrants. This affects the Lutheran churches in Europe which, though covering a wide span from large folk and state churches to small minority churches, all have a fairly strong relation or link to the state in common. First and foremost this relation reflects their understanding of being church, to such a degree

⁴ See Luther, On the Councils and the Church (1539). WA 50, pp. 624-643. Also to Luther the four marks of the Nicene Creed are given as marks of “the holy Christian people, not only of the days of the apostles, who are long since dead, but to the end of the world, so that there is always a holy Christian people on earth, in whom Christ lives, works, and rules?” (*Luther’s Works*, vol. 41, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1966, p. 144). To Luther it is not the creedal marks *sancta catholica Christiana* that are confusing but the German term “Kirche,” understood to be a stone building, for *ecclesia*, which Luther would prefer translated with “people,” the German term “Volk.” To Luther, who translates *catholica* with *Christiana*, the very words “Christian holy people” (instead of the obscure word ‘church’) would have brought with them, clearly and powerfully, the proper understanding and judgment of what is, and what is not, church.” (*idem*).

that the features that constitute a modern European society are also the primary marks of the modern Lutheran church. Thus, the ideals of freedom and openness are accentuated to such an extent that they appear to have become *notae ecclesiae par excellence*, and it is an open question whether we are dealing with a Christian culture or a cultural Christianity.

Due to the privatization of faith and the state's taking over of anything political, the churches despite the Lutheran heritage where an ecclesiology strongly emphasizing a visible and public church plays an important part, became invisible on the sociological maps during modernity.

Simultaneously, the churches, on the whole, have developed into such well functioning institutions, their ministers being so well educated, that there is no real need to explicate traditional Christian or Lutheran doctrines, apparently implicitly understood, culturally embedded as it is. Only once or twice were marks such as baptism, proclamation of the Word, and ministry explicitly mentioned, whilst creation theology, theology of the cross, and the two kingdoms' doctrine played a significant role. Exactly the two kingdoms' doctrine and the application of it as an expression of two separate dominions never to be intertwined, may be the reason why the churches have developed into quite anemic institutions. The true hallmark of the churches is democracy in various forms: "a church for all" mirroring society and the market economy in it, a church with symmetries of different strands, or a church having equality in language, confession, and national identity, but no counter-cultural messages. The leading principle "priesthood *for* all" has substituted the Reformation principle: "priesthood *of* all *believers*." Whereas the former expresses the idea that all, irrespective of faith and religion, are to be rendered service by an anonymous institution, the latter expresses the idea that every church member plays an indispensable and responsible part within a living community. The churches, the Norwegian church with its stress on baptism excepted, seem more occupied with polity and cultural relations than with the community of believers. Correspondingly, catholicity collapses into the latitude of the national or local church, signaling that the modern, open and democratic church, existing in an increasingly pluralistic society, consists of every citizen, irrespective of belief or confession. Thereby the local church disappears into the society as an expression of local, national or ethnic, culture. Furthermore, it leads to a clear reduction of the concept "catholicity" which then is not only reflected in the local church but which actually collapses into a certain societal or cultural formation. What we witness is that nation and ethnic culture have priority over Christianity and the Christian message through proclamation and sacrament, enacted in a transformation of the old Reformation settlement, *cuius regio, eius religio*, ruler now being substituted by ethnicity or nationality and religion by culture.

As a contrast, among these old historic churches, whose history entails an outreaching and not all too glorious mission, there is a clear anxiety about

"imposing beliefs" on people. Mission is primarily understood as a national, economic enterprise to be enacted in openness and freedom only. Consequently, mission is not considered the responsibility of the church institution as such but rather the responsibility of all Christians alike.

North America

Apparently sure of their cultural and ethnic identity, the Lutheran churches in North America at a time of transition, just like the European churches, ask where the church is or should be. Being culturally embedded, indeed, the churches notably set up a free market profile aimed at economic and numerical growth as its missionary goal. What seems to be *the* mark of the churches is a particular lifestyle expressing and mirroring success and efficiency enacted in the particular local church: individuals assembled in "voluntary organizations." Very much in contrast to Luther's explication of the cross as a mark of the church, one is preoccupied with being successful rather than being faithful. Entrepreneurial investment, economy in the strict sense of making money, not so much in the broader sense of *oikonomia* (household), is a primary mark of the overall church organization, and so much so that less economically successful local churches (rural and some ethnic congregations) express much frustration. Therefore, to complete the picture, it should be stressed that *economy* is primarily the mark of the large white American, middle-class suburban churches. To the white rural churches, on the other hand, ecclesiology is foremost translated into *ecology*, the question of a healthy agriculture. Whereas to the Afro-American and Hispanic churches *equality*, the question of a healthy "ethnoculture," is highlighted.

This immediately leads to another very strong mark, namely ethnicity. There seems to be no unified Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) in reality, which is more of an umbrella covering a range of ethnic churches, the Lutheran churches being churches of immigrants who have never forgotten their roots.

Among Lutherans, paradoxical in a society so self-conscious of being American, there is a cultural memory so strong that they uphold ethnic churches preoccupied with conserving traditions, and in that undertaking being more conservative than their churches of origin. Therefore ethnicity is not simply a question of blacks and Hispanics as opposed to whites. And even though blacks and Hispanics define themselves as foreigners or "others," they seem to have been inscribed by the same marks of success and efficiency. In reality, ethnicity is so noticeable and so distinctly accentuated that the various Lutherans define themselves as Afro-American, German, Hispanic, Norwegian or Swedish, according to their roots, before they define themselves as Lutherans planted in North America alike.

In this light, it is no wonder that the ELCA as an organization endeavors to live by the admonition of Bonhoeffer, and be the church *in* the world.⁵ While upholding the three Lutheran *solas* (*gratia, fide, scriptura*), the ELCA also suggests a conversion of CA VII in order to adapt the church to its concrete context. Rather based on an ethics of calling, the true *communio sanctorum* of today's North America is not so much the congregation gathered to worship as it is the church "dispersed and planted" as believers found "in their callings in daily life." Accordingly, the dialectics of ordained ministry and ministry of laity are rendered into one "ministry in daily life," expressly giving priority to contextuality above doctrine. This is not in itself bad, quite to the contrary, but it is bad if a solely horizontal orientation eclipses the fact that Christianity is not just anything. And in the modern, multicultural, market-oriented society the question is not how to discern the true church from the false, the preoccupation of the Reformers, but how to get good customers. Hence, all categories are clearly meant to function as commonplace marks that may differ contextually, from place to place, designed for the customers. To such an heuristic ecclesiology, its positive implications notwithstanding, one may ask if not the marks can become so commonplace that they disappear and stop being marks (something that sticks out from the common context) of the visible church, or so dispersed contextually that unity in *communio* becomes blurred.

Latin America

In Latin America the churches are asking where they come from and where they are going, not seeming to reflect deeply on where they actually are. Consequently, the church in Brazil, for example, marked by its history and heritage as it is, finds its theological and confessional identity in a strong German ethnicity. In keeping with this, the church has until now primarily been seen as a "communion among brothers only" gathered around the gospel (and to some degree the Lord's Supper), whereas an extrovert mission, an including *koinonia* and an outreaching *diaconia* have not been constitutive features. The identity as a primarily German church has been so strong that it has functioned as a *nota ecclesiae*.

However, with new generations growing up as "Latin Americans" and a continent in transition from late feudalism to democracy, the church has been

⁵ Cf. John Kretzman, "The Challenge to the ELCA: To Be the Church in the World," (Unpublished paper presented at the consultation in Chicago.) In this paper we find a modernization of Luther's seven marks of the church, according to the first table, under the heading: "Lutheran identity," called a "mission statement and its accompanying goals of an ELCA college": 1. doctrine of creation as the basis of liberal learning (Word); 2. individual and corporate vocation (Baptism); 3. passion for justice (Eucharist); 4. pursuit of wisdom (Absolution); 5. ethical reflection and community discourse (Ministry); 6. diversity in community (Worship) and 7. service to others (Cross).

forced to interpret the inherited Lutheran principles and Reformation teaching in new ways. In so doing, it is remarkable that it is CA IV on justification by grace through faith, comprising the *sola* principles, not CA VII, which is set up as the most significant *nota ecclesiae*. It is tempting to see this "oblivion" of CA VII, with its stress not only on proclamation but also on sacrament, as deliberate because the Lutheran churches on this continent are so outspokenly reticent towards sacraments and spirituality in fear of Pentecostalism. Perhaps this is also why justification is not so much linked to sanctification, but more concretely functions as *the nota ecclesiae* expressing solidarity with the poor and those marginalized, in opposition to an oppressive and unjust society. Accordingly, justification is understood to be a liberating and dignifying potential that will enable the poor to become human beings, opening a space for encounter, mutuality, diversity and life.

In order to overcome the reductive and exclusive way of having *communio*, the church is now seeking to understand itself by another Lutheran principle: *simul iustus et peccator* (and the *permixtum* of CA VIII?). By identifying itself as both just and sinful, the church hopes to be able to open itself to society as well as to the world as such. Furthermore, the *communio sanctorum* of the Apostolic Creed is conceptualized as a *koinonia* of the people in the widest sense, but particularly the needy, thereby upholding the cross as a mark. Simultaneously, proclamation is enacted in diaconic work and political life (cf. CA XVI). In a sober suspension of the two kingdoms' dualism, the church "from beneath" is rendered visible in the announcement of the gospel, which is also sacrament, to the people and in suffering with the people as its mission.

Africa

The Lutheran churches in Africa, founded by German, Scandinavian, and North American missionary churches, are now seeking out their traditional modes of life in becoming self-supportive and self-governing African Lutheran churches, trying to shake off the continent's colonial history. Opposing the negative aspects of tradition such as hierarchical structures (the Big Man model of leadership) and tribalism, they particularly point to their family and household traditions to be extended as an image of *communio/koinonia* and *oikonomia* for the church as a whole. Related to this understanding of *communio* is the striking characteristic of African churches that a non-sacramental institution such as marriage is utilized as an image of unity rather than the *communio* creating sacrament, the Eucharist, repeatedly pointed out by Luther as being constitutive. On this continent the ancient family structure with its hierarchical affinities is essential, and based on this structure the central question "who the church is" or "who are truly members of the church," is posed.

What must be set up as the most important *nota ecclesiae* for the churches on this extremely divided continent, however, are holism and an holistic understanding of being church. First, it is an understanding of church as *laos*, the whole people of God in contrast to the prevailing and devastating ethnocentrism and tribalism. Secondly, it is an understanding of *communio* as consisting of both saints (including the dead) and sinners, in keeping with Luther's *simul iustus et peccator* principle and the accent of CA VIII. Whereas in Latin America this stress was directed towards ethnocentrism, in Africa it is directed towards a Donatist ethos, a claim for a pure church concretely enacted as an excommunication of those that are deemed impure. Thirdly, it is an understanding of church as a *communio* of sharing, life and unity. Thus, it was strongly accentuated that ideally the church should be a place for people in general, not in the least a shelter in times of trouble, endeavoring to counter the severe poverty and unjust distribution of resources, both locally and globally. Fourthly, both proclamation of the Word and mission are tightly connected and transformed into the evangelization of the social context towards a just and justified society in contrast to an unjust and divided society as well as church. Finally, ministry is connected with servanthood, stewardship and preaching a social gospel (another Bonhoeffer concept also adopted by Asian theologians) which will meet both the physical and spiritual needs of people. The focus is on living out a truly Christian church, the people of which are all created *imago Dei*, thereby combating a divisive and exclusive hierarchical structure and enacting true *diaconia* as its mission of God.

Another characteristic that can be perceived as a *nota ecclesiae* is spirituality. African churches are alone in highlighting the work of the Holy Spirit as well as spirituality and spiritual needs of the communion. Concurrently, church as a *communio* is accentuated as being a gift of God and the real sacramental presence of the risen Christ, in opposition to the actual deficit, sacramentally, in having no communion, and in giving adiaphora priority over confession.

Asia

Like Africa, Asia is a multifaceted continent trying to stand on its own feet as former colonies (Taiwan and Hong Kong being the two last and, as opposed to the rest, thoroughly westernized), and independence is a main goal. In this process, Asia, in all its diversity, is caught between a traditional mode of life, highly static in its hierarchical classification of people, and a modern, dynamic and democratic, mode of life. The Asian churches are plural, but in many respects the ecclesiology, especially of the Indian Lutheran churches, can be seen as a translation of Christian unity (CA VII) to an "indigenous ecclesiology." In other words, an ecclesiology in which independence is a predominant factor. Without a doubt tribe and nationalism combined with an

outspoken strategy of indicting the world⁶ can be viewed as a prominent mark of the church on this continent of which liberation from both former and present colonizers, missionary churches and the global market included, plays a dominating role.

What immediately meets the eye in Asia is the wish to present a beautification of reality. Thus the ideal *nota ecclesiae* is the mark of the cross as a rendition of the brokenness which characterizes the church. In solidarity with the suffering of people and their being victim to unjust structures, the churches in Asia ideally understand their calling to be that of a broken body, thus forming an alternative community to society and the world as such. As a counterpart to the brokenness and exclusivity of the church as well as of society, healing and inclusion constitute further such important ideal marks. In continuation of this understanding, Luther's primary mark, the Word, is translated with "the social gospel" (cf. Africa) and the proclamation of it into *diaconia* and the empowerment of people. On the whole, mission and *diaconia* through practice and solidarity with people are highly valued as marks of the minority church seeking an identity as that of making "a world of difference."

Nonetheless, there is but a vague understanding of a common humanity as the goal of true mission, and consequently little understanding of catholicity in breadth,⁷ both inwardly and outwardly. Considering the strong emphasis put on the Dalit movement and its theology, it is most striking that this ecclesiology is not connected to any kind of creation theology or understanding of all human beings created as *imago Dei*.⁸ And in reality the most prominent *nota ecclesiae* still is that of class or caste and hierarchy.

Comparison and Conclusion

What then can we make of this kaleidoscopic view of the various local and regional churches? The answer to that question is twofold.

First, there is a range of common features. All churches are in a situation of transition, caused by changes in society either in the form of a growing pluralism (Europe), an extensive individualism (North America), a dawning democracy (Latin America), or a modern way of life (Africa and Asia). In different ways all are influenced by globalization which in various ways is reflected in their view of the world as a market, and in their attempts to work out new

⁶ This notion was prominent in most of the presentations from India. Cf. Vitor Westhelle, *Saint, Servant, Prophet. A Theological Reflection on the Church in Asia*.

⁷ Cf. Avery Dulles, *The Catholicity of the Church* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), pp. 68-86.

⁸ The Dalit influence on the Indian church is foremost reflected in identification with the 1st century church, in a focus on liberation from slavery: Christianity in this context is understood as the freeing of the people from the barriers of society, caste, and class.

models of being church. Whatever their type of transition, all churches seemed to see it from the perspective of a crisis, which it quite literally is, namely a moment of change and decision making.

Secondly, as to the nature of the crisis, the questions it raises and the responses to it differ. Questions such as "where are we?" "where do we come from?" "where are we heading?" or "who are we as church?" are different expressions of serious deliberations of what and where the church is. Apart from attempts by the church in North America, to convert Luther's seven *notae ecclesiae*, one can, in general, not perceive a direct reference to these as marks of the present churches. Of course this may be due to the fact that the churches were not concretely asked to address Luther's or CA's *notae*, and that they have become so commonly applied that they are simply automatically understood. However, we must not forget such important factors as time and culture. Time has passed and the world and the church have changed since the 16th century, and as Christianity is no longer a matter of course, there is a tendency to leave the qualifying common *notae* of sanctity and set up quantifying commonplace *notae*. The churches are so culturally embedded that their *notae ecclesiae* often mirror or fuse with the ideals of the societies of which they are a part, wherefore they vary contextually. This may be seen as a positive sign. But when contextuality is materialized in ethnocentrism, tribalism, or provincialism to the extent that it is, it is no wonder that the creedal marks unity and catholicity of the church are rarely mentioned or implied when the various Lutheran churches expound their self-understanding as churches. Thus, the *notae ecclesiae* are, more or less consciously, an immediate reflection of the ideals of the immediate cultural context of the churches.

On the other hand, some churches, as in Latin America and Africa, endeavor to set up *notae ecclesiae* that are counter-cultural, contradicting unjust structures, in order to make a difference in their societies. But even there, one is left with the question if there is a space for sacramental unity and catholicity that transcends the here and now.

The final result is that the people of God, *laos*, is reduced to being solely the people of a certain culture, *ethnos*, while unity and catholicity lose their sense of sharing in the universal community and of transcending the barriers of time and place. If the national and ethnic foci have totally outstripped the universal, what then do Lutherans and Christians at large have in common? What binds Lutherans together as a Christian grouping, and why is there such a grouping as the Lutheran World Federation (LWF)? If we want to have a common ground as Lutheran communities, must we not be in keeping with our common ground, the Creeds and the CA to which it adheres? If we want to remain a *communio* of communities, I see the challenging task for Lutheran churches worldwide as that of simultaneously keeping and transforming, contextually, the confessional *notae*, in order to maintain a sober and solid ten-

sion between the local and the universal church. To keep true *communio*, Lutherans must, while quite correctly being concerned about the local church and the right concretion of its belief in daily life, also be conscious of a qualitative catholicity. This is not to retain old, sterile traditions, but to have a common goal and corrective measure, namely a universality implying a qualitative wholeness of the church in the world, thus aiming at a reconciled unity in diversity. What I aim at is a church with no other limits than that of belonging to Christ. Because, if the churches want to avoid becoming totally invisible on the sociological map, they must focus on the Christian practices by which Christians keep learning about Christ, always transforming, of course, in order that they do not become custodians of a former transforming impact.

On Boundaries and Bridges: Lutheran *Communio* and Catholicity

Guillermo Hansen

During the period immediately following the Reformation the newly formed evangelical (Lutheran) churches were accused by Roman polemicists of losing all of their ecclesial *notae*, particularly that of catholicity.¹ For them the “ecclesiality” of the *ecclesia catholica* was guaranteed by the papacy, while its “catholicity” was assured by means of the institution extending in space, time, and numbers—milestones against which the poor, new, and geographically limited evangelical churches could not measure. It was a matter of universality at the expense of identity.

The Reformers, on the other hand, hold fast to the idea of the *fides catholica*, that is, the continuity of the gospel faith or evangelical tradition as witnessed by the liturgical practice and confessional stand—the “succession of the faithful,” in Luther’s terms.² It was a matter of identity over universality, at least in the geographical, numerical, and temporal sense.

It has not been until quite recently that Lutheranism could speak of the more “extensive” side of catholicity, namely, its presence in regions and countries beyond those in which the Reformation started. The present Lutheran *communio* is a child of the pietistic and missionary organizations, and of the great demographic dislocation of Europeans during the 19th century. It spans continents and has in some places the full credentials of an “historical” presence. Furthermore, there is a rising sense of catholicity—a redefining of boundaries—that many will find even uncertain. New dimensions are being explored, new spheres are being redrawn, and new frontiers are being crossed on the grounds of an “holistic” understanding of the gospel. Has our way of perceiving Lutheran identity been challenged by this novel fact? Has this newly gained “catholicity” changed the way in which we imagine ourselves as Lutherans?

In the following essay I shall not attempt to answer those questions but contribute elements that may guide us toward a response. I will attempt to interpret how catholicity has been understood by different churches and regions involved in the three-year study project, “Communion, Community and Society.” To be more precise, this essay aims at pinpointing the frontiers or

¹ See Hans Küng, *The Church* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1967), p. 299.

² See Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Riddle of Roman Catholicism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1959), p. 47.

boundaries that the churches of our Lutheran *communio* see as the places from which their sense of being witness for the “whole” to the “whole” are played out.

The methodology will combine an inductive and deductive approach: the data will be limited to what the participants themselves outlined, with all the wealth and limitations this entails. The object of our analysis is a self-portrait of the churches, done in a context of reflection and deliberation—recognizing, of course, that this portrayal cannot be but a sketch of the actual, existing churches.

At the same time my interpretation will be deductively biased toward one aspect in particular: the interaction between identity and frontiers (margins, boundaries, borders), which will serve to outline the “catholic” profile of the churches. This entails, of course, a notion of catholicity as well as a methodological commitment to see this—and any other—expression of the church against the general background of the present global world processes.

The Art of Breaching Frontiers

In this essay I will employ as a definition of catholicity the phrase “identity plus universality.”³ It has the advantage of being a synthetic expression that amalgamates both an intensive and extensive dimension. In its intensive expression catholicity refers to the fullness of the authentic Christian belief and identity as it has been handed down since the time of the apostles. To be “catholic” is to be committed to the gospel of Jesus as understood in that line of interpretation that guaranteed the “wholeness” of the salvific act of God. This was the main thrust behind the great “dogmatic” decisions, such as that of the Trinity, the two natures of Christ, and even this “proposal of dogma” that is justification by faith—a very “catholic” doctrine indeed. The Greek adverb *kath’ hólou*, or the adjective *katholikós*—“that which is referred to or directed towards the whole, the general”⁴—precisely conveyed in an explicit way the implicit thrust of the gospel. It is true that this expression was later identified with the church. Ignatius of Antioch (ca. AD 100) employed the term to communicate the idea of the presence of the whole or complete church in the local settings.⁵ Yet it is critical to note that such an ecclesiological mark (*nota*) stems from the very nature of the transcendent—as contained in the narratives about Jesus—to which the church bears witness.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁴ Küng, *op. cit.*, (note 1), p. 296.

⁵ In his letter to the Smyrnaeans, Ignatius writes “wherever the bishop shall appear, there let the multitude [of the people] also be; even as, wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church.” (*Smyrn.* 8:2).

The gospel of and about Jesus is precisely the foundation for this concern for the whole that is a crucial mark of the church's identity. Whether one points to Jesus' messages about the Father's mercy or about the advent of God's reign, or whether the emphasis is laid upon the stories of Jesus' ministry as he crossed the many "frontiers" of his time and place (even death),⁶ the same notion of a catholic *gestalt* comes to the front: fullness, wholeness, universality, healing, and salvation. This *gestalt*, in turn, gives a very specific profile to the body of believers committed with these stories and beliefs.⁷ Where "gospel happens," as it happens when the eternal trespasses the temporality of our existence, the church emerges. Churches share a universality flowing from the universal gospel. But this universality is a reality not only at the point of contact between the boundaries of the temporal and the eternal; it is also a reality when crossing the boundaries that separate people in very proximate locations. Therefore by witnessing to the fullness of time the church participates in a proposal for a modification of space.

Here lies the "universalistic" aspect that the early church expressed through the remembrance of Pentecost, the overflowing of a Spirit who trespasses the temporal location of Jesus' (person and context) to become available to all races, cultures, and nations. It is universality sustained by a new identity. It is not by chance, therefore, that the first critical boundary trespassed by the early church was that separating the vision of a localized fulfillment versus an open one—a case of a new geography, a new "mental map" flowing from a novel eschatological vision.

At this point the more common understanding of "catholic" surfaces: spatial extensity, numerical quantity, cultural diversity, and historical breath.⁸ These are encompassed by the all-embracing reality of Christ, which in turn

⁶ Narratives and memory about Jesus crossing frontiers are particularly important at the moment of understanding the catholicity of the church: it shifts our abstract definitions to the notion of a practice, a mission. As the entire gospel traditions emphasize, Jesus crossed the traditional boundaries of family, of honor and dishonor, of Jews and Gentiles, of men and women, of sick and healthy, of pure and impure, of country and city, of poor and rich (See Bas Van Iersel, "Un disidente de gran talla: el Jesús de Mc 3,20-35," *Concilium* 280 (April 1999), pp. 89-98). It is out of the witness to the Father's mercy and coming reign that Jesus is bound to embody a new space; the space of the Spirit. His body, his presence, becomes the locus for a new narrative not only about God, but also about God as God's Trinity is played out through what God promises and does to bodies. To draw frontiers is an act of power; to trespass them is an act of love...and imagination.

⁷ In this vein the Indian concept "*Yaddha Deva, thatha baktha*" (Gnanabaranam Johnson: "to be imbued with the characteristics of the deity that one worships") could be rightly applied to that body of people congregated around this Jesus as its head: it is not only permeated of the (pneumatic) character of this Jesus, but it mediates through its very structure the reality that Jesus signified. Paul Tillich spoke of the transparency of finite realities to the eternal, a notion that is particularly poignant at the moment of speaking of the church's universality. In the first place there is a universal profile stemming from the very origin of the church.

⁸ Cf. Küng, *op. cit.*, (note 1), pp. 300-301; and Philip Hefner, "The Church," in Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson (eds.), *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. II (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), pp. 208-209.

comes to life in the local manifestations of his body. In the best scenario the spatial-historical expression of being catholic speaks of the gospel's intrinsic capacity to be precisely a message addressed to all. But not only that, for the vocation of the church is to grasp and actualize its identity in every dimension of life, constantly rediscovering its message and mission in its encounter with these. There is no realm that is intrinsically foreign to the life of the church and its members, for nothing created is foreign to the reach of the gospel⁹—although the mode of this presence must certainly be differentiated. It is not a matter for imposing in heteronomous fashion the institutional presence of the church, but to point and witness to the theonomic structure underlining both church and world (*capax dei*).¹⁰

Yet we Lutherans should not be smug at this point. Our concept of "catholicity"—as it will become apparent in our analysis of some regions—is still clouded by this tendency strongly to reify the catholic dimension of the church to the point of presenting a "Nestorian" ecclesiological rationale (see Vitor Westhelle, *Saint, Servant, Prophet: A Theological Reflection on the Church in Asia*) disguised by the formula of the *satis est* of *Confessio Augustana* VII (CA VII). It is as though theologically grounded "structures" (as Sven-Erik Brodd points out¹¹) could exist independently of the organizational implementation and expression of such structures. Are we not dragging—both in Europe and beyond—the "karma" of the unholy alliance between Reformation and the rise of nationalism?¹² Yet, in our view, there is strong evidence for considering the *satis est* of CA VII as implying that the true identity of the church is inseparable from its true unity...and catholicity. This is one of the points touched upon at the end of this essay.

In brief, intrinsic to the concept of catholicity is this tension between identity and universality, consolidation and transgression, tradition and innovation, staying and crossing, local and global, particular and universal. Catholicity, in short, implies not only to be present at the many boundaries, but also to discern which ones need to be crossed, which ones need to be dismantled, and which ones simply need to be named and made visible. The gospel narra-

⁹ See Paul Tillich, *Teología Sistemática*, vol. III (Salamanca: Sígueme, 1984), pp. 212-213; Hefner, *op. cit.*, (note 8), p. 207.

¹⁰ But in the worst scenario in grappling with catholicity, space and time cohere to present a continuum which is no longer sustained by the flow of the Spirit but appears to need the historical and institutional continuity guaranteed by a sociological fact—as the church of Rome seems perennially inclined to assert. In practice, catholicity—in this version—becomes synonymous with the co-extensiveness across landscapes and centuries of a dominant local appropriation of the catholic gift. The autonomization of its institutional form cannot but be perceived as an heteronomous imposition on others—against which the Reformation protested, and as the scars of the "evangelization" of the Americas still reflect.

¹¹ See Sven-Erik Brodd, "The Role of Ecclesiologically Significant Structures for the Communion in a Pluralistic Community: Some Preliminary Remarks." Unpublished paper.

¹² Cf. Pelikan, *op. cit.*, (note 2), p. 56.

tives about the "crossing over"—a programmatic drive in Jesus' ministry and God's mercy and love—also entails that not every boundary has the same capacity to "reveal" the essence and identity of the gospel. Not every bridge is capable of a transit to the whole.

The task now is to see how the local churches we visited and listened to in this study understand this tension implicit in the catholic drive of the gospel. I shall take the notion of frontier (boundary, borders, margins) as the *locus* from which to explore this question. Secondly, some conclusions will be offered as to the possible sense that we can give to catholicity, considering the conditions attached to the processes of globalization. As Leonardo Boff has pointed out, the reality we loosely term "globalization" forces a redefinition of the meaning of being "catholic" and current paradigms of being church.¹³ In this regard our view must go beyond the "effects" of globalization in spheres such as work, technology, communications, demography, and national allegiances, to extend to a conception of "field" or "fabric" within which our churches live and move. Globalization, in other words, is more than the sum of its parts. It is more than a (neo-liberal) economic expansion. It is more than one social order or a single process. It is a new regime of production of space and time emerging from multiple movements and forces involving different combinations between the local and the global as well as between the local and the local.¹⁴ In brief, it is a new field within which processes of homogenization as well as fragmentation are constantly reordering boundaries, and therefore the "place" of the church.

What does it mean to be church, and what is the value of its "catholic" dimension in the midst of this reordering? For the purposes here outlined the answer will attempt to imagine the place of our Lutheran *communio* within the new "universality" of globalization. In what follows we shall gather some threads that may point to an incipient new proposal for relating the local and the global, a proposal that may outline a new strategy challenging the heteronomous dynamics of globalization. Could it be that a sort of "globalization from below" may help us also to imagine a role for our global communion of churches? Can we be a significant net in the midst of the texture of our present world? Can we move on and affirm that catholicity is the external basis of *communio*, and *communio* the internal basis of catholicity? Are we at the boundary of a truly epochal change, one that will bring a significant ecclesiological change?

¹³ See Leonardo Boff, "Christianity with an Authentic Face: Reflections on the Future of the Church in Latin America, in Karl-Josef Kuschel and Hermann Häring (eds.), *Hans Küng: New Horizons for Faith and Thought* (New York: Continuum, 1993), p. 164.

¹⁴ For this concept see Néstor García Canelini, *La globalización imaginada* (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 1999), p. 47.

Learning to be Catholic, or How to Build Bridges across Fluctuating Boundaries

In this section I shall review the different regions visited with the intention of picking up threads relevant to our proposed theme. The reader should be aware that in most cases I will concentrate upon the presentations of the host country of the region visited, which for organizational reasons had more time allotted to them.

Asia: An overwhelming otherness

Of all the regions visited this is the one where the word "globalization" most often surfaced. My general impression is that as a category "globalization" worked as a catch phrase for all manner of economic and social ills, with the "West" identified as its main culprit.¹⁵ Globalization was seen as a new form of "political and economic colonialism" (cf. Kunchala Rajaratnam), a new system of oppression that creates new forms of bondage, slavery, and debt. In spite of the obscure and ominous perception of globalization (a matter to which I shall return) it is beyond doubt that the Indian churches have pointed their prophetic finger at a very critical issue. What sort of *communio* can be practiced in the midst of the asymmetrical realities created by the onslaught of financial capital? In our analysis this question reads as the identification of a frontier, a boundary that raises important issues as to the claim of the church's catholicity, touching at the same time the core of the typical Lutheran hermeneutic of the two governances (regiments, governments, formerly "kingdoms").

While this concern outlined an implicit self-understanding of the church in its prophetic role *vis-à-vis* the economic ills of society, it is interesting to point out that this prophetic nature—more strongly present in those regions where Lutheranism is a minority—was also accompanied by a sort of priestly representation of those most excluded in society, the Dalits (outcasts). In effect, the Dalits seem to embody the messianic characteristics of a "remnant," characteristics that in turn are shared by the church that is in solidarity with them. The fact is, however, that very few outcasts, not to mention cast-Indians, are actually Christians—and even less so Lutherans. Here one dimension of catholicity seems at odds with another; the lack of "extension" militates against the ability of the church to actualize its identity from that social and cultural location. Why is it that in spite of this powerful prophetic voice the Dalits themselves do not seem to feel interpreted or represented by the (Lutheran) church?

¹⁵ This was notoriously the case with the presentation from India, as distinct from the ones of Hong Kong and Taiwan, usually referred to as the "Asian Tigers."

It seems to me that the Lutheran churches in India are very conscious of the socio-political boundaries, and on this score are quite aware of the social dimension of the catholic identity. At the same time, one can question whether the churches have accurately tied Dalit identity to Christianity. In fact the knots seem rather loose and sparse. The church *may* assume a prophetic and priestly role, even be an important nexus between different "people's movements," yet the "people" seem to be not religiously drawn by its ministrations. The point is that the prophetic voice requires a sacramental basis, an incarnate life to draw upon, a substantial abundance mediated by people who are captured by the eschatological vision. Without it, the prophetic fuel runs out sooner or later (a point that we shall see also in Latin America). Is this due to external factors such as the increasing rise of Hindu nationalism, or are there more "theological," internal reasons? Can the Lutheran voice be more than a voice? Is the church simply overwhelmed by the symbolic and cultural complexity of Hinduism?

The case of India is, indeed, unique. Nowhere else is the church faced with such a formidable religious-social-cultural complex. It may well be the case, however, that the minority situation of the Indian sample bespeaks of a new "catholicity" that the Christian church has never heard nor imagined before, namely, the inexhaustible depth of the God that we witness, who may in fact contemplate different soteriological ends or fulfillments.¹⁶ But even if this is so, one cannot hide the fact that the "social project" that the church sacramentally embodies seems at odds with that of, for example, Brahminical Hinduism and its legitimization of caste distinctions.

Another possibility exists, namely, that the minority church may assume a universal role precisely mediating a wider and global perspective in contexts that are prone to new fundamentalist and nationalistic drives. But again, if the church lacks a deep contextual anchorage the (unfounded) accusation of the "foreignness" of Christianity is soon raised up, barring the church of meddling in local affairs. At any rate, this is a frontier that is not restricted to the churches in India, but pertains — in this newly globalized world—to all of us. How catholic can the church be? What happens to the catholic drive in face of the existing —and expanding—world religions?

There is a third frontier that recurrently surfaced, and paradoxically cohabits with the critical vocation of the church in the face of globalization: the form in which power is exercised in the church. There was a consensus that a wide chasm existed between bishops, clergy, and church officials on the one hand, and the people or laity on the other. What kind of chasm? It seems to be a matter tied up with an endogenous social status rather than actual eco-

¹⁶ On this issue see S. Mark Heim, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion* (New York: Orbis Books, 1995).

nomic distinctions. While it is true that members of the church at large, as well as its ministers and officials, are always engaged in a process whereby power must gain acceptance, the question is what kind of power must the church retain in order to express the fullness of its identity? What symbolic horizon regulates the exchange of power? It was quite evident that the concept of *koinonia* or *communio* did not lend itself as a rule or criterion for the understanding of community and therefore of power. Strong boundaries seemed to exist reflecting a structure of power that distorted the gospel message. It is as though the relationships that govern the churches in India militate against the wholeness and integrity of the catholic thrust. Might it be that the churches in India, at this particular point, are as "Indian" as their surrounding context? Is there a particular conception of the sacred that has not been "baptized" by the gospel of Christ? Have the dividing boundaries of society surreptitiously crept in?

In summary, I found in this region a clear understanding of the "unholiness" of the caste-boundaries, and a prophetic call against the destructive drives of the new economic order termed globalization. The latter will be in tune with frontiers also identified in other regions. Yet I also found an uncertain position concerning God's presence mediated by other religions (a legitimate field to ponder about the "catholicity" of God), and a paradoxical drive embodied in the internal stratification of the church that jeopardizes the church's integrity and credibility.

Africa: The growing presence of Lutheranism

Two things struck me in our visit to this region. First, all presentations save one (Madagascar) mentioned either the concept "wholeness" or "holistic"; second, this was the region that most clearly articulated a "substantial" theological understanding of the sacramental dimension of the church in its call to embody the universal call of Jesus (notably M. D. Biyela and Ngoy Kasakuti). Both aspects bear heavily upon our theme.

A sense of what is meant by the idea of wholeness or holistic can be perceived in the following assertions: "The degree to which the church is capable of meeting societal needs determines the degree of its relevance in society" (Leonard Mbilinyi); "The relevance of the church in any given society is seen when it enables the people of such a society to enjoy the wholeness of life" (*idem*); "communion, community and society are one and the same, and they are not only part of African life but make life itself in its holistic measure and definition" (Owdenburg Mdegella); "[the church's policy] is to serve the whole person" (Solomon Endashaw); "the church today continues to understand itself to be responsible for all aspects of human needs church today understands herself to be responsible for all the aspects of human needs." (A. Hasheela) One should also say that there were impor-

tant qualifications to these definitions, but overall they enjoyed a wide consensus.

It was interesting to note that the interpretation given by the African participants showed an implicit—and strong—inculturalization of the notion of holistic: for them it was the natural, African way of understanding matters pertaining to body and spirit. Reference to what was called “primal worldview of Africans” (Leonard Mbilinyi) stressed once and again the holistic anthropology¹⁷ of this region. The encompassing, all-embracing church seems to be the ecclesiological model which best suited the gospel brought by the Europeans as it met the African soul. “Classroom, clinic and cross” (the three “Cs”) erected, at least in some regions, a powerful compound. The church seems to be so “catholic” in its embrace that one wonders what is left out of it.

The picture, however, has some rough edges. In the first place one may wonder if this ecclesiological model really came forward by a thoughtful process of inculturalization from the hermeneutical horizon of the African “primal worldview.” While the important role of missionaries in bringing this about was always valued, one has to ponder if this “all-embracing” character of the church is a mere expression of the African soul or the result of failed attempts at modernization and development. Might it be possible that the church is occupying a field that results from the systematic failure (or sheer absence) of other institutions in society? Could it not only be the result of economic poverty, but also of the weakness of civil society itself?

Perhaps the latter is too much of a “Western” concept to be applied to Africa, yet I feel entitled to posit this view since it was a problem brought forth by two participants in slightly different fashions. One stated that in her view the role of the church is not to replace the social responsibilities of the state, but to strengthen civil society. Quoting the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer (*Ethics*), Anna Mghwira reminded us that “the space of the church is not there in order to try to deprive the world of a piece of its territory, but in order to prove to the world that it is still the world which is loved by God....” Interestingly, Mghwira found in Bonhoeffer’s reprimand of Luther’s hermeneutics of the two regiments an important tool for addressing and redressing the lack of clear boundaries in the social responsibilities and engagements of her church.

Other participants indirectly agreed, hinting at an unholy acquiescence between the power of the church as “provider” of services, and the defenseless and poor “consumer”—yet not devoid of a questionable traditional perspective. *Diaconia* takes the place of *koinonia* when “people need to see the immediate social implications of the [church’s] presence among them. People have become increasingly blind to the significance of the Christian faith ...

¹⁷ It would be too much to say a cosmology, for in the presentations little if any reference was made to the larger structures of the universe, not even to the immediate environment.

they prefer that the preaching of the gospel to all people were replaced by secular *diaconia*." (Thomas Nyiwé)

It seems to me that many of the African churches have, in a sense, too heteronomous a conception of their catholic dimension, thus interpreting that the church itself must be the protagonist in all spheres and areas of life that have to do with the development of the whole person.¹⁸ While this concern is undoubtedly a good hermeneutic of the gospel's goals, it confuses the *means* by which these promises may be realized. There certainly should be no objection that the church can and must undertake different responsibilities in the social field. The problem is when by so doing it impoverishes both civil society and the state (for removing some of its responsibilities), or it becomes an hindrance to its own religious credibility. There is another way to realize the catholic call of the church when out of its identity it is called to empower the goals of other institutions and groupings as theonomous expressions of its own witness.

The lack of clear boundaries seems to be, at least in some African cases, the main hindrance to its catholicity—wholeness rhetoric notwithstanding. Even some aspects of the possibilities for a sustainable economic development might be tied to this. But the lack of boundaries that leads to confusion between the church as community and the church as society (see Dietz Lange, *Church as Community – Church as Society*) has another side effect: the close ties established between tribal identity and religious allegiance—or church organization, as in dioceses divided along tribal or linguistic lines (Tanzania). Again, one can see that this is not merely an "African" problem; in fact it has been one of the main strategies of Christian mission throughout its history (whether Roman Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant). But it becomes a problem when *ethnos* is equated with *koinonia*. Most of the times the church simply adapts itself to an *a priori* scheme of power and identity, jeopardizing not only the proper gospel understanding of power (such as in India) but also the very catholicity that the church is sacramentally bound to signify. In the end it does not matter that the boundaries of church or denomination coincide with an ethic or tribal group, as the tribal or ethnic is made to coincide with that of the church!

This problem was precisely voiced by the representative of one of the South African churches (M. D. Biyela)—which may speak of the hermeneutical disclosure of a different multicultural human geography. He strongly emphasized that the sacramental representations should become the basis for an African ecclesiology, assuming that it opens up a different terrain to reimagine the quite fragmented tribal geography. "We need to stress the sacramental

¹⁸ There is another aspect of this concept of "wholeness" that is also lacking, and that is the one referring to the ecological dimension of human and social existence. Surprisingly this theme was not stressed enough.

dimension of the Eucharist...the blood of Christ can bind those who have different bloods." What I liked in his interpretation is that he seemed to imply that one need not change "bloods," but to make it flow in quite another system. It is a matter of a new organic identity—a theme to which I shall return.

Again, in summary, I found in this region one of the most explicit conceptions of the "wholeness" implied by the gospel, yet a lack of precise boundaries insofar as the institutional presence of the church in society is concerned. The two regiments hermeneutic, as for example reinterpreted by Bonhoeffer, may be a valuable theological tool for the churches of this region. There was also a good theological understanding of the universality of God's call in Christ, yet a difficulty in expressing such a call beyond the tribal confines. May it be that processes apparently "alien" to the action of the gospel (economic development, demographic displacements, urbanization, and so on) might in fact very soon change this reality? Whatever the answer, one thing is clear: this appears to be one of the regions that will strongly shape the future face of Lutheranism.

Latin America: A region choked by impasse?

Of all regional meetings this was by far the most disappointing one. During the last few decades Latin America has been a region generating new perspectives and identifying new challenges. Yet, present-day challenges brought in by a new world situation and the deflation of historical expectations appear not to have been either theologically or sociologically digested by the churches in this region. A sort of "magic realism,"¹⁹ stemming from a fascination with the radicalism and purity of ethical principles and voluntaristic strategies, appear to dominate any serious attempt to step down onto the prosaic and harsh density of economic and social rationalities. Yet, trying to resolve in a mythical way the quandary of the mismatch between longings for justice and progress and the cold facts of economics, between the imagined and the real, seems one of the biggest problems pending to be faced. When no compromising bridge is found, a pervasive disenchantment ensues: it is expressed as either a romantic rejection or as a pragmatic accommodation. At this juncture we find a frontier outlined by a "mental map" thoroughly shaped by utopia instead of *teletopia*. There is no room for relative or compromising solu-

¹⁹ I understand this notion as referring to a sort of paradisiacal state that somehow was spoiled from "outside". In this perspective—noticeable in much of Latin American literature—the continent is perceived as inhabited by fantastical ancestral forces, oblivious to any objective data. Gabriel García Márquez' "Macondo" (*Cien años de soledad*) shows through some of his characters this line of thought: in Macondo work and guilt are non-existent, the cyclical time rules over linear time, there are no new events, just repetition of the archetypical ones, etc. For a critique of this view, Juan José Sebrelli, *El asedio a la modernidad* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1991), p. 310.

tions, just romantic and dramatic ones. This promotes a mentality of a mythical belief that the continent is periodically visited from "outside" either by grace or disgrace, as though it were the fatal victim of a world conspiracy or benevolence.²⁰

Yet there are some elements one can rescue for our inquiry that reflect a vivid undercurrent still present. What were some of the boundaries detected? On what terrain was the catholicity of the church felt to be played out? The categories employed by one of the presenters, that of the *new* margins or borders in society are noteworthy.

Inclusion/exclusion appeared as an important category for defining the new dynamics governing society. (Werner Altmann, Mario J. Yutzis) Thus to the ministry with "traditional" victims of displacement or oppression—landless peasants, unemployed, the poor, refugees, and so on—are now added the "new" faces of exclusion²¹—women, victims of HIV-AIDS, drug-users, prostitutes, transvestites, gay and lesbians. (Lisandro Orlov, Valeria Bock) From these "places," from the new faces of suffering, some of the churches recognize the call of Christ who told his disciples that he would be present where the dignity of the people was wounded. In this fashion many Latin American churches recreate some of the elements of a theology of the cross that has been correlated with the "crucified" by history, culture, society, and even the church.

But while these elaborations spoke of a deep theological mediation of the present situation, the ecclesiological response led these issues into the realm of a paradox. It was hinted that the most formidable boundary to the church's mission was precisely the unwillingness of the actual communities to heed this call—at least in what appertains to the integration of these boundaries within the sphere of the community gathering around Word and sacraments. (Lisandro Orlov) Theological, cultural, and ecclesiological causes were mentioned, yet the walls of the church were clearly pictured as the most formidable obstacle to realize its full catholic identity. (Wanda Deifeldt, Marga Ströher) One way to "sublimate" this paradox between call and actual identity may be reflected in the sharp distinction detected between *koinonia* and *diaconia*.

Related to this, another topic came into view that combined multiple issues pertaining to identity, mission, culture, and church. Within the macro-paradigm of inclusion/exclusion the identifying tag of "justification by grace through faith" appeared time and again. How did this category operate? Clearly as a boundaries-redrawing principle which not only "placed" the church's mission in society (as above), but also provided a strong identity marker *vis-à-vis*

²⁰ This concept was expressed, for example, in the sort of poetic construction stemming from the contraposition of two different levels or orders: "The *grace* of God" in contrast to "the Latin American *disgrace*." This implies that either God has decided to withdraw grace from the region, or that grace is a sort of state achieved after a long process.

²¹ When I say "new" it does not mean that this wasn't there before; it is the social and cultural perception that is new.

the Roman Catholic Church. While the ecumenical cooperation with the Roman Catholic Church was repeatedly pointed out (especially in regards to social and economic causes), it is also a fact that Lutherans clearly perceive themselves as qualitatively different from their Roman Catholic partners. This distinction has to do with a perceived ecclesiological inclusiveness whereby Lutherans put a high emphasis upon forgiveness and freedom. The "catholic" identity of the Lutheran church, one could say, is confirmed by the freedom that it bestows on its members. Justification, inclusiveness, forgiveness, and freedom—that seems to be the winning formula.

Of all the regions visited, the relation between justification and (church) identity has been the strongest here. Yet a sort of autonomous "antinomianism" appeared to underlie this notion, presumably biased in dialectical reference to the heteronomous practice of the Roman Catholic Church. In classical terms, justification was set against the backdrop of a freedom *from*, but little was heard as to what this freedom was *for*. One of the outcomes appears to be a weak sense of community understood as a task that stems from our freedom. This becomes particularly important when defining the boundaries and identity of the church. While it is true that most churches insisted upon diaconic outreach (loosely termed as "mission"), it is also true that this activity was clearly seen as something that the church "gives."

In principle there is nothing wrong with this picture, but it becomes so when the notion of "giving" is confined to the services that the church provides. In this vein, perhaps the main service that the church can provide—*itself* as a community that gathers around the gospel and the sacraments—is brushed from the picture. The church is here to give, never to receive. The fact is, however, that the valuable prophetic role and the ecclesiological model of the servant (*cf.* Avery Dulles) may act as an impediment for a different ecclesiology that unashamedly could present itself as a space opened for all.²² Evangelization and mission are set as boundary markers for "evangelicals" and "liberals." But this is a kind of vicious circle, whereby the catholic identity of the church looks as if it never is able to realize itself. Is this responsible in part for the meager Lutheran presence in this region? Is religious, spiritual, or theological "quality" set up in too sharp of a fashion, creating a sort of new exclusiveness in the name of inclusiveness? Can the Latin American ethos "qualify" for Lutheran freedom? Are Latin Americans "worthy" enough to become Lutherans? Voices calling for a true inculturation of Lutheranism in Latin America clearly point to a very important frontier in this regard. (Lisandro Orlov, Gottfried Brakemeier)

The last boundary that I want to mention is perhaps the most difficult one, although not very much elaborated upon at the meeting. The topic was indi-

²² The fact that the Brazilian church chose the motto "here you have a place" shows that this issue is seen as a predicament.

rectly approached through the reality of the magnificent growth of the Pentecostal churches in Latin America, particularly among the poor. (Arzemiro Hoffmann) Here I link a frontier that has to do with the exclusive character of the Lutheran inclusiveness mentioned above, with the capability of Lutheranism to articulate from within the religious expectations and needs of the Latin American people—particularly among the poorer sectors. When exploring the Latin American region a sort of false sense of catholicity may come into sight if by this term we simply point to the institutional-diaconal presence of the church on those borders, margins, and places marked by the category of exclusion. For, in effect, what kind of church can we be if our presence can never be actualized as the presence of community? It is as though Lutheran churches indeed express a catholic vocation with regard to service (an ecclesiological model in itself), but not so much with regard to essence (insofar this is expressed as the rights of the other, the different, to be an integral part of our community). Can the object of our action really become a subject? Pentecostalism may be theologically criticized in many aspects; the point is that their growth has shown that there is a religious demand poorly addressed by Lutheranism, as well as other “mainline” Protestant churches. I said before that this is a formidable demand because it touches the religious core of an ecclesiological identity, namely, the model through which one imagines how to be church. Should not a sacramental model help to qualify the excessive stress on the servant model of the church?

In summary: The identification of the axis inclusion/exclusion as the means for erecting new boundaries in society and culture is a very important tool for redrawing the church’s sense of being catholic. There also was a strong sense of the “intensive” dimension of catholicity, but the “extensive” expressions are rather lame—especially as it touches the numbers of people drawn into their communities.

North America: Multiculturalism and church

At this regional meeting, the noticeable social demarcations were remarkable in the presentations reflecting the different social settings of the presenters. Prioritization of different boundaries was bound to emerge. I shall start with one of them corresponding to the identification of a boundary existing between “rural America” and “agribusiness.” (Sandra La Blanc, Muriel Lippert Schauer, Ronald Duty) It is not simply a matter of the classical distinction between “city and country,” for what is encompassed in the description of the “rural” often refers to towns and small cities linked by an economic basis centered on a “family-farm” mode of production. In fact, it was about the conflict emerging between a vital form of capitalism in American history (with its foundation in the homestead harmonically linked to the industrial economies of cities), and the new globalized world economy (its face, as re-

vealed in this context as "the globalization of the food system"). It is interesting that strong Anglo-American values were mentioned during descriptions of the realities of "rural America": independence, family, freedom, caring, fair trade and competition, localism, and so on—a sort of reservoir of tried and true all-American virtues.

The point in contention was not whether the church was able to manifest its presence in this context. As far as membership and composition are concerned, the Lutheran church in the United States significantly comprised "rural" congregations in the widest sociological sense.²³ Rather, the issue at stake was the apparent inability of the church to be an effective force in protecting the economic and social structures supporting such a large percentage of its membership. This quote summarizes the issue well: "In 1999 we stand on the edge of a precipice. There is a very real crisis going in American agriculture. Prices for most commodities are at their lowest levels in 50 years. Farm families are hurting. Does anyone care? Does the church care?...The average person in the pew of a rural congregation wonders if anyone really cares about them." (Muriel Lippert Schauer) A strong feeling of disenfranchisement goes hand in hand with an increasing proletarianization of former farm owners. A social class is disappearing, to be replaced by large corporations in a system which, ironically, will introduce a new form of serfdom from which many of the Europeans immigrants once escaped—at least as it is perceived in the popular "mythology" of farmers and ranchers. (Sandra La Blanc)

Beyond this frontier signaled by the responsibilities for the church to be an advocate for an economic lifestyle rapidly disappearing, there is another larger boundary that looms: the tension between the local and the global. I am not speaking merely of the obvious fact of diverse economic interests. Rather I'm referring to when these interests are viewed as a serious barrier to a real catholic expression of the church. (Kunchala Rajaratnam) The following summarizes this well: "What does it mean to the average person in the pew of a rural congregation to be in communion with millions of other Lutherans around the world? Some of those millions of Lutherans are the very people that are engaged in a trade war with us." (Muriel Lippert Schauer) In no other context had such bluntness been as present as here; nowhere else the socio-economic boundaries so dramatically portrayed. So sharp was the distinction between the dynamics of the local and the global that strong boundaries were also established between the local and the local—when the local-cosmopolitan is perceived as serving interests contrary to the local-rural. (Sandra La Blanc) Can the catholic sense of being a *communio* be of any assistance at this point?

The boundaries stemming from presenters from urban and suburban locations were quite different. Here multiculturalism was the catch phrase for a

²³ It was pointed out that "over 5,000 of the ELCA's congregations are rural" (Ronald Duty).

network of boundaries set in constant negotiation. At one point, a lively discussion ensued regarding the degree of representation of those representing ethnic or minority groups, signifying that a different set of boundaries exists inside the compound of defined identities. Be that as it may, the fact remains that the churches in North America have been the most vocal churches with regard to the universality and multicultural dimensions of a truly catholic church. A paradigmatic example—notwithstanding typical American idiosyncrasies—is set here for the rest of the Lutheran *communio*. The diversity and equal representation of our meeting was a lively statement as to what the North American churches *want* to be.

Wanting to be, however, is not the same as being. The question remains, therefore, whether this “multiculturalism” is more an imagined than an actual fact. In other words, to what extent is the global or universal dimension signified by multiculturalism actually present at the local, congregational level. Is multiculturalism built from below or vice versa? At this point one may wonder if the boundaries signified by ethnic or other identity markers (women, homosexuals, etc.) do not tend to acquire a life of their own, subject to a sort of process of “essentialization” (reification), which ends up *de facto* legitimizing multicultural separatism.²⁴ If identities are *essential*, it is difficult to envision anything new, any critical principle that may question aspects of the other’s identity that may be oppressive for the common good. Probably these identities coming into view where boundaries touch seem more promising for a more thoroughly multicultural vision; shall we rather speak of a *critical multiculturalism* which places *mestizaje* (the mixing of traditions) as something to be more highly regarded? There is always a history of violence behind processes of *mestizaje*, but equally violent are dialectics of “the same and the other” involved in the process of vindicating one’s (particular) identity.

Finally, some concluding thoughts about the theological perspectives of the churches in the region should be mentioned. Overall—in contrast to other regions, especially Africa and Latin America—the conversation was dominated by a rather thin theological description (yet with plentiful references to the world of experience as *locus* of new religious insight). Was this the logical consequence stemming from a multiculturalism that simply celebrates “being oneself”? In the North American context one certainly cannot speak of a lack of engagement with society and culture, but one wonders if the same enthusiasm is invested in key theological issues that reflect a critical appraisal for this engagement. The exceptional emphasis was given by one of the representatives of the church in Canada. (Arthur Leichnitz) He referred to a theology of the cross as a symbolic and practical counterpoint to the success-driven

²⁴ On this topic see Canclini, *op. cit.*, (note 13), p. 109.

ideology of North American societies. Here a boundary was drawn that every church true to its identity must make: the prophetic boundary between itself and the surrounding culture. I believe this awesome sense of the Otherness of the cross that is really the foundation for the critical encounter with others was truly present in his exposition.

Summarizing: This is a region that clearly expressed its willingness to explore the catholic implications of being a world *communio* of churches; a strong emphasis on multiculturalism spelled out one of the most important places from which today our churches should understand its catholic practice. Likewise it showed a strong sense that the definition of the local church cannot ignore the self-definitions of the global church. Yet something to be noted is a tendency to be too much of a reflection of societal and political boundaries without casting a new social vision that may fuel alternative social practices.

Europe: The eclipse of Lutheranism?

By the time we reached Europe we had a good exposure to the different expressions of Lutheranism around the globe, as well as to the new forces of integration and fragmentation within the societies where Lutheran churches are present. But while in all these regions the local component has obviously been a target of analysis, nowhere as in Europe have the idiosyncrasies of the local concerns so eclipsed the global.

In effect, one of the first boundaries identified was the one represented by the new process of European integration—the European Union itself, as well as the new map resulting from the dissolution of the former Eastern block. A new sense of the local seems to be coming into view, where the category of region plays a very important role. National barriers seem, in some places, to be falling (Richard Fischer), creating a new sense of “region”—and thus creating a new map for church mission. In other places old church boundaries seem quite outdated in the face of relatively new political boundaries (e.g. Germany). The fluctuation and movement of people can also be seen in the identity of the Italian church, maintaining close ties with the German and Scandinavian churches.

Still, the larger horizon or boundary that European churches seem to envision were those of Europe itself, with very little reference to realities beyond those of the old continent. (Even the notion of “region” is no more than an expansion of already quite homogeneous traits). This could be seen at the level of the analytic discourse as well as in the defined identity of the European churches themselves. In the first case world realities were referred to insofar as they affect the present European *status quo*—identified either as the problem of immigration and challenge to European identities, or with the destabilization of the welfare state by the new labor conditions. The role of

Europe and its economic power in the present world arena, especially in relation to the actual subsidizing role of the world's resources maintaining the cherished European high standard of living were barely mentioned.

In the second case, as to the identities of some European churches, at most an historical or ethnic link seems to be all that connects them with churches outside of Europe—and also within Europe itself. (cf. Anton Tikhomirov) The only significant kind of relationship that seems to loom in their purview is that of the mother-daughter churches. This appears in marked contrast to other regions where the global dimensions of *communio* were much stressed upon, triggering the search for new modes of relating.

Social analysis also pointed out another boundary that seems quite peculiar to the European scenario: that of an aging population and the concomitant "generation gap." The church as one of the few spaces in society for the encounter between generations was peculiarly emphasized in Germany (Günther Overlach's "community of communication"). The same could be said for the situation in the Scandinavian countries. The role of the church as bringing together the old and the young (a vital element of catholicity) was also seen as a model for other social boundaries and the role which the church may play in bridging them: such as unemployed and working people, the established and the marginalized, the native and the immigrant. Where churches were evidently in a majority situation the church was imagined as a valuable player in civil society (Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hanover); where churches were in a minority situation the languages of mission and reaching out were most often heard (Saxony, France, Italy, Slovakia, Hungary, Russia). In this context it was spoken of "being church *with* others." (Christoph Münchow)

The latter clearly shows that a distinction between the situation of minority churches and those that could be called either majority, regional or national churches, is a very marked feature of the European scenario. Eventually this will evolve into different ecclesiological perspectives interacting with different stances in society and culture, as for example was posited by the concept of "voluntary minority church." (Christoph Münchow) Therefore "mission" (or evangelization) is evaluated differently and places the entire supply-side of the religious equation in a very diverse light.

Following our focus on the catholic dimension of the church, the large European churches present a very interesting case where a dialectical relationship appears to exist between the latitude and spaciousness of its borders and the depth and breadth of its appeal. It's a matter of universality versus identity (the situations of the Nordic churches, especially those of Norway and Denmark, and to a different degree that of Sweden come immediately to mind).²⁵ For in effect: what does it mean to be a large Lutheran

²⁵ And less so those of Germany, which lived a different process since World War I.

church within a context that seems quite content in its social and economic achievements? In the lands of the sagas and myths there still appears to be a sort of a "Lutheran mythology" that makes it difficult for those churches to come to grips with a culture and society that have gone well beyond the traditional institutional forms of religion in their quest for meaning. It looks as if these churches were bogged down by the tension to maintain their structural place in face of changes produced in society, seeking new institutional readjustments (Sweden). At stake here is the seeming inability to re-imagine boundaries without falling into the (Weberian) dichotomy church versus sect, as well as the difficulties in unraveling national identity and ecclesial affiliation.²⁶

This matter clearly surfaced as being one of the main concerns of the Scandinavian churches. The spokesperson for Norway, for example, pointed out the ecclesiological tension existing in her country between a *communio* conceived as embracing all the baptized members (guaranteed by the constitution), and one which restricts its borders to those who actively gather "around the altar for communion." (Aud V. Tonnessen) A similar chord was struck by the representative of Denmark, who insisted on the spaciousness, openness and latitude of the boundaries of the Danish church for ensuring "extensive spiritual freedom without the risk of losing membership." (Hans Gammeltoft-Hansen) But while the concept of inclusiveness, space, and latitude is undoubtedly both attractive in the midst of our postmodern fragmentation, as well as resonant with a catholic thrust, the "quality" of the identity that is purchased at such a price remains to be seen.

Does not this type of latitudinarian, "broad" ecclesiology, speak *de facto* of an acquiescence to the role conferred either by national constitutions or legislations—not to mention their bondage to different political interests? Are not these churches in bondage to the territory defined by ethnicity or language? What kind of *notae* are these? In view of this picture it is impossible not to sympathize with some of Kierkegaard's thoughts as he blasted a church that looks as if it had lost its soul. The point is that baptism and citizenship seem to collapse into one another. It is worth noting that baptism and discipleship are not markers of different ecclesiologies but constitute a whole.²⁷ That baptism is tied up with discipleship should not come as a surprise for a tradition that not only cherished the Pauline perspective in its interpretation of the Christ event (*cf.* Rom 6:4), but which has also repeated the same no-

²⁶ This is a matter that is approached quite differently by the German churches.

²⁷ In Bonhoeffer's words: "Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession, absolution without personal confession"... "Baptism is essentially passive—*being baptized, suffering the call of Christ*. In baptism man becomes Christ's own possession." Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan, 1959), p. 47 and p. 256.

tion in its symbolic books.²⁸ This appears to be the key theological theme in the attempt to supersede false boundaries between majority and minority, between church and sect, between nation and church. For in the end our "suffering the call of Christ" sets the real boundaries which mark the passage from a people's church to a church of people. (Else Marie Wiberg Pedersen) In brief, the bottom line with these latitudinarian ecclesiologies is that their very "broadness" becomes a threat to its catholic impetus, and therefore to its very essence as a church.

Summarizing: This region has expressed a strong concern to readapt to the present social and political conditions of Europe; but often this adaptation is confused with a reordering of institutional structures that little affect the missionary drive of the churches. The strong regional ties and cooperation that some folk churches or *Landeskirchen* have with churches in a minority situation (especially in Eastern Europe) are worth noting; however the weak sense manifested regarding an awareness of sharing and belonging to a worldwide, truly catholic *communio*—beyond the imagery of an extension of European mother churches—calls into question their catholic consciousness.

Conclusion: The Lutheran *Communio* of Churches as Narratives for a Catholic Plot

Our journey ended on the continent that witnessed the birth of the Reformation, and more precisely in one of the "hubs" of 20th-century Lutheranism: Lund. Yet our travels around the globe already brought to light the many cultural, social, national, and geographical boundaries that Lutheranism has crossed since the 16th century. Indeed, we are in a position to state that at least in some sense our communion can be said to have a truly catholic vocation both in its intensive as well as in extensive dimensions. Yet it is within the latter that a notion looms quite "green" in our midst, namely, our ability to think of ourselves as being organically related. It is as though we have not yet figured out the shape that catholicity as the external basis of our *communio*, and *communio* as the internal basis of our catholicity, should take.

That this vocation is growing seems to me tied not only to a process of theological reflection around the ecclesiological theme of *communio*, but to the new challenges and thrust posed by the process of globalization. The link between socio-political events and theological and ecclesiological ideals is

²⁸ Luther, in his exposition on baptism in the "Small Catechism" (IV,11-14), writes: "[Baptism with water] signifies that the old Adam in us, together with all sins and evil lusts, should be drowned by daily sorrow and repentance and be put to death, and that the new man should come forth daily and rise up, cleansed and righteous, to live forever in God's presence." Theodore Tappert (ed.), *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), p. 349.

not something new. Jaroslav Pelikan,²⁹ for example, noted that the Patristic ideal of catholicity was indeed older than Christianity itself. In effect, the church rode on a "catholic" expectation that was prepared by the Roman Empire and the strong philosophical currents popular at that time (Stoicism, for example). In a similar fashion it could be said that the contradictory phenomenon coined as globalization functions as an analogous space that opens new possibilities for the expression of the catholic identity of the Christian church. On the positive side this new landscape or field has meant, among other things, an intensification of cross-cultural and inter-social communicative action that harbors deep promises for a new universalism and catholicity—as I shall note briefly.

As far as the intensive side of the catholic impulse is concerned we noted in our visits a common theological legacy or a common theological frame, which maps a (symbolic) territory shared by Lutheran churches. That is the case, for example, with the concepts of justification, grace, and cross, which for many express the irreducible catholic drive of the gospel that in turn outlines a semantic field within which old and new boundaries for the catholic expression of the church are identified. While I perceived different stresses, I did not perceive any basic disagreement as to these identifiers of Lutheran identity, truly catholic in scope. Moreover, considering the quietistic effect that a misuse of the two kingdoms doctrine have had, almost all churches agreed that this catholic (universalistic, holistic, inclusive) drive is expressed by the active and critical engagement of the community with those boundaries and realities that hinder the catholic dimension of the gospel. This speaks of a characteristic of the perceived Lutheran identity, namely, its commitment to see the identity of the gospel actualized in every dimension of life. The different "boundaries" detected above reflect the different strategies by which our churches seek to express this drive. Our identity, therefore, is not a matter of fueling the inertial drive of the past (tradition), but an event that permanently flows from breaching the boundaries met by the church. The catholic vocation of our churches comes to light as they attempt to grasp and actualize the gospel in every dimension of life, constantly rediscovering its message and mission in their encounter with these.

Yet here a more critical issue comes into view that has to do with some aspects of the catholic ideal that are expressed by and through these critical engagements by our churches. This comprises at least two levels that are related to the structural-organizational medium of a catholic drive, and the sort of "mental map" spawned by this drive. Both levels, however, belong to a single reality: the "ecological" system and mental outlook that the Lutheran network of churches is likely to bring forth.

²⁹ Pelikan, *op. cit.*, (note 2), p. 25.

First, while we spoke of the catholic vocation of our churches it is also a fact that often the churches visualize their engagements as autonomous, not to say as autarchic modes of expression, quite unrelated to any global strategy set out critically to address the fragmentation and asymmetries produced by globalization. While local action is valuable (as noted above), the final criteria for action always become the local, almost the parochial, lacking any effective way of communicating beyond the local in pursuit of common strategies to face global challenges and demands. Therefore the global and its implications are mostly addressed through the mediations offered by economic and political structures, inevitably ruled by the logic of geopolitics and the relative increasing of local standings. But, what other type of mediation regarding the global can members of our churches visualize?

I believe that globalization presents a new window of opportunity for a *communio* of churches to actualize one of its catholic components, both at the local as well as the global level. If the process of globalization is a reordering of boundaries that separate the global and the local, should not a catholic outlook empower churches to become more organically linked as well as to engage in strategies that effect a different dynamic to globalization—a globalization “from below”?³⁰ I am afraid that only strategies of this sort will help to promote vital spaces where the threatened life on this planet can flourish. It is also an indispensable tool to redress the instinctive local “ghettoization” that seems the only solution for many “localities” as they face the asymmetrical effects of globalization. Only an effective “catholic” symbolization of our identities can provide an alternative to an instinctive “falling back” upon the certainties of the local expressions.

The matter, therefore, is not simply related to the ability of drawing common strategies in face of common dangers or challenges; perhaps more importantly it has to do with the creation of a symbolic space that allows members to conceive a sort of “citizenship” or belonging that supersedes the natural, instinctive identification with the local—a possibility, nay, a necessity spawned by the new geography of globalization. Here the relation local-global, with its ecclesiological correlates, becomes a critical issue, for it is constantly reshaped by the speed of communication, travel, exchange...and new forms of oppression and exploitation. Typical slogans such as “think globally act locally” appear to need reformulation, since today there is no local action that is not equally global, and vice versa. Moreover, the very concept of “local” church and its reputed sovereignty and autonomy looks totally outdated. While local assemblies are indeed the foundational cells of the church, their organization along regional, ethnic, linguistic, or national borders are in crisis, for the ceaseless

³⁰ For this notion see Xabier Gorostiaga, “Entre la crisis neoliberal y la emergencia de la globalización desde abajo,” *Nuevo Mundo* 50 (1995).

reordering of boundaries brought by globalization increasingly challenges them. The issue here is not so much the convenience of a specific ecclesial structure or administration, but the appeal and "power" of a family of churches to link its people in a meaningful way across historical and fluctuating boundaries. This may even present a new pattern for secular communities in their realization of belonging to a "common home."

The local, consequently, may be viewed in its double relationship to the global—which leads us to yet another aspect of catholicity. On the one hand it is the *locus* for the realization of the global. On the other hand it is a constitutive knot of the so-called global. We have to learn that we are an integral part of this "field" creating and reordering boundaries. We, along with others, have the possibility of multiple local actions that can be strategically linked in order to influence different directions of global trends. Therefore the characteristics this globality will take will be largely determined by the nature of localities that are built daily with a purposeful and sought-out link with other localities around the globe. This casts into a new light the irreplaceable dimension—and sociological advantage—of a worldwide network of churches that has symbolically declared its communion.³¹ For in effect, while the above is a sociological truism, its force is even more evident in the case of the church since it sets as its very ideal and horizon the eschatological vision of a humanity and nature reconciled in Christ.

Finally, if one of the concrete facets of globalization is this intensification in communications, the possibility for a new "multilaterality" in the conversation that defines the identity, purpose, goals, and aims of a social body comes to the fore. If in the past centuries a monocultural grouping was in charge of transmitting across cultural boundaries the "religious truths" of Lutheranism, today these truths emerge from the practice of a universal communication across worlds quite complex and distinct from the "original" one.³² This communication is everyone's and no one's in particular³³—a fact that may show itself in disorderly, imprecise discourses that must find their common threads as they meet and evaluate their differences. Therefore the catholic dimension of Lutheranism, far from being the imagined expansion of northern-European religiosity, becomes a field of permanent interpretation and negotiations between all of those who are committed to interpreting their religious

³¹ I purposefully leave out the wider ecumenical (and macro-ecumenical) landscape, for these can only be approached through the limited expressions of confessional and other types of church families.

³² See Heim, *Salvations*, *op. cit.*, (note 15), p. 80. He follows a typology developed by David Krieger, *The New Universalism* (New York: Orbis Books, 1991). As an example of what I have in mind it is sufficient to mention the self-definition of the task of the department for Theology and Studies in "Ten Theses on the Role of Theology in the LWF."

³³ See Vitor Westhelle, "And the Walls Come Tumbling Down: Globalization and Fragmentation in the LWF," *Dialog* 36/1 (Winter 1997), pp. 32-39.

experience in terms of the grammar pointed out by the Lutheran tradition. Yet the lexicon will be, no doubt, quite diverse, as for the first time the issue of identity is set in the midst of the question of plurality...and the plurality of interpretations.

It is at this point that I believe that catholicity, as the external basis of *communio*, is the best assurance against hegemonic interpretations disguised under the cloak of universality. One can juggle with concepts and ideas, but it is difficult—not to say unethical—to do this with the bodies and faces that express these perspectives and concepts.³⁴ A catholic practice means the concrete embodiment of plurality, for it bridges the apparent incommensurability of local identities with the universal plot of the gospel. Catholicity, in other words, is a commitment to live a religious identity that is never enclosed by our pluralistic belongings; in fact the catholic *nota* is the event whereby our communities seek to communicate and link their destiny to those beyond the immediate borders. Therefore it is more appropriate to speak of a catholic *process* to which we are committed rather than a catholic *essence* that is somehow grasped from beyond: nowhere but in the intended openness to one another is the catholic dimension of the gospel expressed. In this vein, in order to assume the full practice of this catholicity, certain forms of organizational strategies must be in place allowing for the expression of an organic relationship between all those involved.

In this vein a *communio* of churches that is conscious of its catholic commitment will not only develop the concomitant organizational strategy for the expression of this catholicity. It also will shape and reshape the concrete meanings flowing from the fact of belonging to a system of diversities, organically related through its symbols as well as organizations. This will involve a new Lutheran “ecology of the mind,” that is, a different psychic integration of members able to expand the notion of identity to the level of mutual care and concern. (cf. Israel Peter Mwakyolile) It entails what Miroslav Volf has termed a “catholic personality,”³⁵ the breaching of localities and boundaries as we envision who we are. All this calls for communities open and bound to express their catholic *nota* through an unceasing process of convergence. Churches that are poorly linked to this system are simply destined to a slow agony and poor integration—even within their own local societies.³⁶

³⁴ This topic becomes even more critical when we recognize the fact that news, images, and ideas travel faster across boundaries than people.

³⁵ See Miroslav Volf, “A Vision of Embrace: Theological Perspectives on Cultural Identity and Conflict,” *The Ecumenical Review* 2/47 (April 1995), p. 199.

³⁶ Some churches, mostly minority ones, are quite aware of this situation and therefore their openness to a more catholic comprehension of the church seem more plausible than for churches in a “majority” situation. This casts a favorable horizon for the family of Lutheran churches since most of them are, in fact, minority churches. May this simple sociological fact be a blessing in disguise? Perhaps, but it is also critical to understand that even the so-called majority

In brief, our Lutheran churches seem eager to explore the growing sense of catholicity that comes with our declaration of being a communion of churches. There is, in some sectors, a demand for implementing the organizational means for a truly decentralized yet transversally linked community of churches. Symbols need embodiment, as sacraments need concrete elements. Our partial manifestation of the universality of the Christian church needs not only visible expression and manifestation, but also a growing sense of mutual belonging and commitment. Catholicity is the name when unrelated fragments have the chance to become "others" for us, to be open for us. And openness, of course, is an invitation for change. In sum, catholicity is indeed a vocation, a vocation that realizes the universal aspiration of our fragmentary niches.

churches are bound to live a process of adaptation to a post-Christian milieu, with all the sociological implications of such a state (as the cases of the Church of Saxony, and maybe the Church of Sweden, clearly show).

The Times of God and the Ends of the World. Church and Eschatology in the Lutheran Communion

Vítor Westhelle

I Types of Eschatological Thinking

When Hegel lectured on world history, his argument was clear: the development of world history "goes from the East to the West, for Europe is absolutely the end of History, Asia the beginning."¹ The present ecclesiology project—*Communion, Community, Society*—has somehow followed this same geographic and solar movement beginning with Asia moving through Africa into the Americas finally to end up in Europe. Taking Hegel here at face value, it is then proper—in reflecting on the relationship between church and eschatology—that we start at the *eschaton*, at the end and then move back incorporating the eschatological self-awareness of the church on the other continents this program has studied. Hence I will begin where we ended our field study, in Europe, and end where we began: Asia. But before I engage the case studies as such let me propose three basic types of eschatological thinking that I see operating here.

First, bringing Hegel into these introductory remarks fulfills another important task apart from providing a strategy for linking history to eschatology—the great paradox of Christianity. Hegel's famous thesis about the end of history culminating in European self-consciousness reveals for him a problem that he decides to solve by cutting through the Gordian knot he himself created. The physical sun's movement indeed goes from the East to the West. But since it completes its course in the West, says Hegel, it is in Europe—as the summit of the West—where the inner sun of self-consciousness rises to the greatest splendor, and where it also stays.² There is a clear eschatological vision operating here. It presupposes that history is a continuum that metaphorically follows the longitudinal movement of the earth's rotation on its axis and around the sun. Since this movement is perennial and circular, but history—as the registrar of novelty—is not, and it aims at a climax, Europe represents the end of this movement. The end of history, its eschatological fulfillment, is indeed the final triumph of this eschatological model. It is final

¹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, vol. 12 (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1970), p.134.

² *Ibid.*

in the sense that it was left without any possibility of further interpretation, for in realizing it—or in declaring it realized—Hegel preempted any possibility of further interpreting it; the system was complete and therefore closed. Within this eschatological model we have the dominance of the longitudinal interpretation of time as a continuum with a *telos*.³

Second, the merit of Hegel has been to shift the whole discussion of eschatology from an otherworldly perspective to an immanent one, making the end of things the culmination of a historical process instead of an exit from the world or from time. As Karl Löwith remarked,

...Hegel believed himself loyal to the genius of Christianity by realizing the kingdom of God on earth. And, since he transposed the Christian expectation of a final consummation into the historical process as such, he saw the world's history as consummating itself.⁴

Hegel was arguing against a form of eschatology that we could call transcendental in the technical sense of the term, in other words referring to non-sensuous realities. Such a transcendental type has found its expressions in a spectrum that ranges from the popular pie-in-the-sky theology to the elaborate, existentially argued, ecstatic suspension of time in an eternal now. The transcendental type of eschatology has been and continues to be extremely influential in Christian circles and can be observed as operative all over the world in spite of its Gnostic overtones. This is, then, the first distinction I would like to introduce, the one between a transcendental eschatology and another immanent to the world's history, of which Hegel might be the best expositor.

Third, however, a further distinct type can also be recognized. Hegel's heliotrope has been fundamental for framing the modern Western understanding of history and then also of its end or consummation. The heliotrope as the basic metaphor for history in the Western world ties it definitely to a *longitudinal perspective* of the world. It assumes that no matter where we are, this perspective is always the same and homogeneous as the movement of earth on its axis and around the sun. In other words there is one universal history.

One of the revealing aspects of the study program was to show that the heliotrope and the rendition of the world's consummation in immanent terms is not enough to account for what can be called a *latitudinal perspective*. This perspective emphasizes not the chronological movement but the topo-

³ And the options here are only two; either one goes for an unending progression that inevitably would lead to a cyclical view of time (and, as Nietzsche saw it unequally well, to a relinquishing of all responsibility), or to a postulation of an end, which Hegel proclaimed, and then had his followers in all the prophets of a new era that would do away with what had come before—from new societies, to final solutions, to the war to end all wars, to globalized capitalism, or any other version the end of history motif has taken in the North Atlantic world.

⁴ Löwith is commenting of Hegel's famous proposition that "die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht." *Meaning in History* (Chicago: Phoenix, 1964) pp. 57-58.

logical awareness that place and locale do play an important role in the understanding of history and eschatology. The Greek term *eschaton* can have either a chronological or a topological meaning, and it is often the case that the two meanings are so intertwined that it is impossible to discern one from the other. An end in spatial terms can also be an end in time, and vice versa. In this latter, latitudinal, sense, eschatology focuses not on setting a doomsday in the calendar, but in understanding the end as an end of *my/our* world. The emphasis on the end of what we know our world to be, its place, its locale, its circumstances, the context that gives an identity to "I" or "we." The last things, the *eschata* are registered in a topological matrix. This different rendition of the end is the general impression one gets in moving from the Northern to the Southern hemisphere—a movement that defies the importance of this heliotropism.

That the whole perception of reality changes by one's placement has been an intriguing thought already for Europeans following the great maritime adventures of the 15th and 16th centuries. Barlaeus, the early 17th-century Dutch philosopher, commenting on maritime travel accounts, concludes that there is no sin south of the equator, for there all is inverted. A couple of centuries later, Hermann Borchard, writes in his diary aboard a ship that was taking him across the equator as the first missionary sent to Brazil by the Prussian church: "We would not only change the day for the night, the summer for the winter, but we would enter a totally new situation, which will change the conceptions of the world we have had until now."⁵ We may label such remarks as belonging to a genre that could be called "latitudinal apocalyptic." They are aware, albeit naively, of the fact that place and locale matter as far as the definition of the world—and then of its end(s)—is concerned.

Some characteristics of this form of understanding eschatology are found, particularly, in the churches of the South. However, the sense of this latitudinal awareness is not simply a geographical one, and often it is not geographical at all. It mostly expresses itself in terms of social, political, religious, cultural, economic, ethnic/tribal, and other types of "spaces" or "territories" one inhabits. The basic issues that were raised in the churches of the South have to do with this latitudinal or topological perspective in which the ends, the *eschata*, have to do with a limit, a margin, a demarcation, a frontier, a border which represents at the same time a trial, an experience of consummation. Its crossing represents the hope of another world and also raises fear and increases the risk of annihilation. The other world, be it heaven or hell, and anything in between, is on the other side of the divide that demarcates one's place.⁶

⁵ Hermann Borchard, "Die Mission unter den evangelischen Deutschen in Südbrasilien," in *Evangelisches Zentralarchiv in Berlin*, doc # 123989.

⁶ About the importance of spatial categories in the midst of globalization see Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

If one takes the suggested reversal in the actual order this study took and moves from Europe to North America, South America, Africa, and then to Asia, it is possible to make two general observations. The first is that the movement from East to West in the Northern hemisphere (Europe to North America) corresponds to an increase of the eschatological awareness of the longitudinal type. The second is that when we move from the Northern to the Southern hemisphere we are going to observe the emergence of an eschatological thinking often marked by a latitudinal or topological perspective. However, it is also the case that the transcendental type of eschatology is very much present everywhere. Finally, in none of the regions should we presume to have exclusively one type of eschatology. They indeed overlap with different emphases. With these three perspectives in mind (a transcendental, a longitudinal, and a latitudinal type of eschatology), I will review how the question of eschatology presents itself in the Lutheran communion.

The Kingdom and the Church

Eschatology is about the last things. Technically it is the doctrine concerning the final consummation of the world and the coming of God's kingdom. But how these last things are going to be interpreted varies significantly. And thus varies also the relationship between these last things and the church. If these last things are the ones that refer to the advent of the kingdom of God, the way one envisages the relationship between church and eschatology is therefore also the way in which the relationship between the church and the kingdom is viewed.

For brevity's sake one can distinguish fundamentally between two radically different ways in which this relation is conceived. The first is to understand it in terms of continuity; the other is to stress the discontinuity between church and kingdom. One sees the kingdom as a goal, as a *telos* toward which the church is oriented and in which it reaches its plenitude.⁷ The other sees the kingdom as being marked by an end, a breaking in (*adventus*), a rupture sometimes carrying apocalyptic overtones.⁸ The first emphasizes the church and the history in which it is inserted as being *essentially* connected to the kingdom as its own *telos* (*ecclesia triumphans*) and only *incidentally* to the world (*ecclesia militans*). The opposite position sees this relation as an external relationship: the end of things comes upon the church as much as upon the whole world. In one extreme the emphasis lies on the eminence of

⁷ The most recent example of this position is found in the Declaration by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, *Dominus Iesus*.

⁸ See Walter Benjamin, *Iluminationen* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1977), p. 262 ("Theologisch-politisches Fragment") who is a good representative of an apocalyptic or messianic eschatology.

the church and its history; its termination is thus interpreted as its final fulfillment and glorification. In the other case, termination is a negation; it is a boundary that points to a beyond, to another reality; the triumphant church is the *hidden* church. This way of relating church and the kingdom builds on the vision of John of Patmos: in the New Jerusalem there is no temple (Rev 21:22).

It seems to me clear that the Lutheran churches we have studied and visited tend to have an understanding of themselves that would lean toward the second way of conceiving the relationship between the church and the kingdom. Even in the case of northern and western Europe, considering the demographic strength, political importance, and (in the case of Sweden and Finland) high liturgy, there was an awareness of the intrinsically weak and frail character of the church, of the present concealment of its true marks, "for we walk by faith not by sight." (2 Cor 5:7)

II Europe

The longitudinal eschatological perspective, predominant in Europe and also in the USA, has been a significant contribution to the eschatological discussions since the end of the 18th century. Europe has amassed significant criticism of transcendent types of eschatology and reassessed the notion of *apokatastasis ton panton*, the restoration of everything, as integral to the Christian faith, thus connecting history to eschatology. That history is redeemable is at once the great problem, but also the great contribution that recent European thought has offered to the world. And this seems to be a motif that, if not explicitly formulated, is indeed at work in the self-awareness of the European churches. The European contributions to the worldwide theological discussions on ecclesiology and also on eschatology have been unsurpassed. But it is also the case that because of this remarkable accomplishment in the history of Christian thought, Europe, in general, and the Lutheran churches, in particular, have also revealed a deficit in thinking about their own contextuality, the limits of their own identity. (The exceptions are the countries in which the church lived under unfriendly Communist regimes.) This deficient contextual awareness is not unrelated to the eschatological deficit there also observed, insofar as a context presupposes limits and a conscience of its own transience. But this seems to be slowly changing and elements of contextual awareness are appearing on the horizon. And it is this dawn of a contextual awareness—that might bring with it a renewed eschatological sensibility—that is becoming more and more relevant as Europe experiences its own sense of displacement and realizes its own particularity.

In the presentations of the European churches at the meeting in Höör, Sweden, eschatology appeared neither explicitly (with one exception there was total silence about it)⁹ nor implicitly (issues and concepts pertaining to the last things like boundary, limit, frontier, margin, consummation, condemnation, salvation, eternity, newness, and so on were hardly brought up). Keeping within the frame of a longitudinal perspective (with a lingering transcendental eschatology in some contexts), this low level of eschatological awareness might be explained taking into account the recent traumatic history of the European Shoa and the tragic experiments with the so-called "real socialism." The continent that, about 200 hundred years ago, thought of itself as the end of history went through those experiences that have made the belief in *new* societies, in *final* solutions, or in globalization theories at best a psychological nightmare and at worse the angelic announcement of an impending Armageddon. Hence the great European innovation in eschatological thinking, namely the longitudinal view, exhausted itself by overdoing its remarkable accomplishment: the yoking of history and eschatology. From another perspective it is important to realize that unlike the Lutheran churches in other parts of the world, Europe has not only the longer history, considering that it was the birthplace of the Reformation, but also the deeper sense of continuity with the two millennia of church history (with the possible exception of the Middle East and Northern Africa, but in these places the Lutheran presence is almost negligible).

The deficient eschatological awareness observed in the European context can be explained as a result of that exhaustion of the longitudinal view. One of the consequences was the reassessment of the transcendental type of eschatology, framed within existentialist philosophy mainly in the first half of the 20th century (the early theologies of Barth, Bultmann, Gogarten, and Tillich are sufficient to illustrate this reassessment).¹⁰ However, even these existentialist reinterpretations do not seem to be playing a major role at the turn of the 21st century. But what is indeed surprising, in this context in which the eschatological awareness has been low, is the fact that the church was still conceived as an ephemeral communion, not being essentially related to the kingdom. Hence also in the European context the emphasis on the discontinuity between church and kingdom is preserved.

However, the reason for the relativizing of the church has other roots than the eschatological awareness. It seems to be fundamentally linked with that which is the most remarkable characteristic of the European context, namely, its way of understanding secularization. The church is less defined by its rela-

⁹ See the essay by Christoph Münchow in this collection.

¹⁰ It is certainly the case that the inspiration behind these thinkers is Kierkegaard, whose *Philosophical Fragments* can be read as a reaction to Hegel's historicizing of eschatology.

tionship to the kingdom than to secular society. Unique and exclusive to the European context is this sense of inhabiting a post-religious world, of living *etsi Deus non daretur* (as if God did not exist). This seems to be the impasse: in the attempt to solve the Christian paradox of having history along with eschatology, Europe chose history and is now painfully realizing that this history has an end. But it is not the end of the world's history; it is the end of European historiography, its limit, its particularity, the discovery of its other, the realization that it is not in itself the universal history.¹¹

North America

Reaching the western side of the Atlantic in the longitudinal move in our research, what we were able to see is that this perspective produced, in the North American context, some new versions of the end of history, of what is to be regarded as the last things.¹² And they were legion. Small farmers in the Midwest are facing the end; the gender or the race divide as a form of an apocalyptic Rubicon is being approached; the relationship of the "empire" to other forces in the world is framed in a "star war" eschatology; the Cold War that now continues in the practice of demonizing international enemies is read with apocalyptic overtones; there is a bad consciousness toward all its military adventures, or its economic imperialism; and the environmental crisis looms large while waste grows. All these point to a millenarian scenario. If in Europe the churches were exercising their ability to discern shades of gray and avoided limits and demarcation ("spaciousness" or "broadness" as a notion used to describe the Danish church could well be used with different levels of accuracy to describe the European churches in general if compared to the North American churches), in the North American context (and, particularly, the USA) the black-and-white divide (and not only on race issues) predominated. The "frontier" language brought to theological reflection an implicit eschatological motif, which was, however, not explicitly elaborated.¹³

It seems undeniable that an ominous eschatology is always playing itself out in the North American context. In addition to the issues that were raised,

¹¹ See Jan Patočka, *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History* (Chicago: Open Court, 1996).

¹² Notice that it is first in the English language and in the U.S. that the German immigrant theologian Paul Tillich framed his theology around the eschatologically shaped notion of "ultimate concern." The German non-eschatological *das Unbedingte* has been used by him before, but I could not find the German rendition of "ultimate concern" (*was uns unbedingt angeht*) being used as a *terminus technicus* before the American exile.

¹³ The case of Canada, it should be observed, can be placed somewhere between Europe and the USA, as a hybrid case. The impact and still shaping influence of the European ethos in Canadian society is markedly more decisive than in the USA.

some of which I listed above, the almost innocent announcement of the new millennium and all the new challenges it brings along is such as to suggest that the coming of the year 2000 would represent a qualitatively different transition, which was associated with promises and dooms. Although transcendental types of eschatology are very popular in the USA (the influential "rapture" theories are the most radical expression of these), the longitudinal perspective expresses itself in the strong belief in progress and prosperity. That belief sometimes reaches the extreme of a realized eschatology conveyed by the popular notions of postmodernity, post-criticism, and globalization and its twin notion of the end of history (in Francis Fukuyama's version). There is only one history—and it goes by Wall Street, passes through Washington, D.C., and ends on the beaches of California.

An example of how this eschatology is presented can be observed in the insidious use of the notion of "inclusiveness." It is so much emphasized in the U.S. context because exclusion is really the norm.¹⁴ Inclusiveness is the American vernacular for the *apokatastasis* doctrine and it is always postulated as a *telos*, a goal to be reached, for which "mission statements" are drafted and "long-range" planning processes are set in motion—the merit of which is not to accomplish the goals set but to keep alive the belief that there is a *telos* to be reached. As a result of this longitudinal eschatological vision the politics of inclusiveness aims at the assimilation of the other, at a blending and homogenization of differences. The vision often presented is not of the coexisting presence of otherness like in the Pentecostal story of Acts 2, but the idyllic futuristic vision of Isaiah 11 in which the wolf shall dwell with the lamb. This eschatological utopianism has often served to mask the present inability of dealing with actual difference. The language of "political correctness" as one of the strategies of inclusion is the best illustration of this search for homogeneity while dissimulating true and actual differences.

However, those who feel excluded often raise their voices, bringing a tone to the conversation that reveals an awareness of a topological or latitudinal eschatology, a consciousness of locale and place, and an impatience in endowing an idyllic future with possibilities that in the present are denied. Or worse, creating visions to defuse the task of the present. Such voices resent the strategy of assimilation even if they make tactical use of its politics in the struggle for their rights. This is particularly the case with theologies and their ecclesiological expressions that are aware of ethnic, racial, gender and class issues. Although these voices were relatively well represented at the consultation, its actual presence in the Lutheran churches is almost negligible (as to ethnicity it is about two percent of the ELCA membership, the rest being

¹⁴ See Octavio Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1985), pp. 355-76, for the characterization of U.S. society as being "exclusivist."

of Caucasian descent) and efforts to increment this presence have been largely unsuccessful.

Latin America

In the Latin American study, the stark economic contrasts, the political partitions, and the social instability has certainly provided the background for blunt versions of the transcendental type of eschatology. These are clearly presented in the growing Pentecostal churches throughout the whole region, but also in evangelical and charismatic sectors of mainline churches including Lutheran. This is not a negligible renewal of this type of eschatology, which provides, in the apt expression of Lalive D'Epinay, a haven to the masses. In this case the churches see themselves as no more than a lobby to the kingdom. Ecclesial structures are loose and the pneumatology potent. However, what might be the most important contribution coming from Latin America (and then also from Asia and Africa) is the keen awareness of topology, of the latitudinal perspective. In the words of Bishop Pedro Casaldáliga of Brazil, while watching for the signs of times we should not forget the signs of places. And the reasons for this awareness are legion. I will mention some of the most important ones.

First, on the social level the centuries-long unequal distribution of land and the failure in most of Latin American countries to implement efficient land reforms (Mexico and Cuba are the exception) have brought about the issue of what a vital space means and how is it related to life in its fullness and even to eternal life.¹⁵ This is particularly relevant for some Lutheran churches, like the Brazilian, whose membership has been mostly made up of small, and increasingly impoverished, farmers and peasants. Second, on a continent that until recently was ruled by military dictatorships, people began seeing an alternative "other world," a utopian society often identified with political regimes elsewhere (like Cuba or China). The importance of these examples has less to do with the actual political model adopted, but with the fact that they were regarded as exactly the ideological opposite of what the military regimes seemed to represent. In this an ironic mirroring effect is often missed. The alternative political visions were projected into historical possibilities that could not bear the weight of the expectations.

Third, on the economic front the option for a socialist mode of production set the agenda for many people's organizations offering alternatives to the market economy that ranged from land-shared (communal) property to alter-

¹⁵ See Viggo Mortensen (ed.), *Region and Religion: Land, Territory and Nation from a Theological Perspective*, LWF Studies 4 (Geneva: DTS/LWF, 1994).

native (native or traditional) medicine, and a whole array of cooperative experiments in between. Fourth, on the cultural level a strong movement of inculturation reflected the need for a whole society permeated by the recent colonial past to define itself precisely as *the other* of the colonial powers that have dominated its past. In the arts, literature, philosophy, and theology, this latitudinal otherness has been expressed in an effort to redefine the Latin American identity from the other side of history, to use Gustavo Gutiérrez's expression. That history has "sides," and not only links in a linear chain is a metaphorical way of describing the crucial contribution of Latin America also for the framing of eschatology.

Accordingly, the Lutheran churches' eschatological self-understanding was defined by its being called to situate itself precisely in this divide that separated the ways things are and the way they were expected to be. Sometimes it dared to risk its own existence (the church of El Salvador might be the most recent and moving example) and other times it accommodated itself to the *status quo* (a tendency of some larger churches, like in Brazil and Chile). The Lutheran churches, with their moral charter and awareness of their eschatological proclamation, found themselves in this dilemma of finding their sense of belonging in a minority situation. The dilemma was on the one hand represented by the temptation to adapt to society and lose the eschatological edge, and on the other, of offering themselves as the vanguard of the world to come. However, if the voices heard clearly in the discussions held with representatives of the churches allows one to decipher clear eschatological motifs operating in the self-understanding of the church, it is also the case that the obliteration of gender issues (see Else Marie Wiberg Pedersen, *Traits and Tensions in Ecclesiology*) theoretical naïveté in regard to the church's theological self-awareness (see Joachim Track, *Prophetic Service and Pastoral Care*) and disregard for the race issue revealed the selectiveness and shortcomings of the eschatological perspectives being explored. This is the danger of latitudinal eschatologies: they are often particularistic and have blind spots.

Africa

In the African context the basic shape of the eschatological awareness among the Lutheran churches was variously expressed and existentially lived out on a continent that, with few exceptions, has most of its infrastructure depleted or never developed. The level of financial indebtedness of most African nations is such that, unless a concerted effort on the part of lending nations to cancel or substantially diminish the debt is successful, most of the continent might simply disappear from the modern world for the foreseeable future. The recent colonial past with the creation of artificial nations and borders have only heightened the tribal divisions that in some cases have escalated into genocide. Religious

tensions mainly between Christians and Muslims are another way in which in many parts of Africa the end of a traditional social formation is being experienced. But most drastic of all of the above mentioned *eschata* is the AIDS/HIV epidemic that is sweeping throughout sub-Saharan Africa producing demographic changes of yet unimaginable proportions.

In this situation the church is undergoing an eschatological experience, at many levels. This is also, like in Latin America, often cast within a transcendental type of eschatology that is often expressed in Lutheran churches. But drastic changes in the traditional cultures, the impact of the AIDS epidemics on the demographics of the region and also on the economy, the financial indebtedness, and the religious struggle for the allegiance of the people—all of these set the church in the midst of a turmoil that can best be characterized by an apocalyptic scenario. In its midst the church finds itself often hesitant trying to hang on to the traditional African ways of life and facing the new challenges that are bringing Africa as it has been known to an end. The transition to what is to come, like in most forms of apocalyptic thinking, is as much a reason to despair, as it is a ground for hope. Crossing this divide and connecting the treasures of the past with the yet unknown shape of the future is the challenge for these thriving churches and exactly the place where a topological type of eschatology emerges.

The Lutheran and other churches, in these eschatological contexts, are at the same time a beacon of hope and a mirror of these very same problems. On the one hand, the churches' strength in Africa relies on its ability to integrate itself organically within the proverbial African communal life. It is in this context that the strong image of the church as the household of God and the sign of a new humanity has been uniquely emphasized (see Karen L. Bloomquist, *Who's "In" and Who's "Out"?*; Dietz Lange, *Church as Community – Church as Society*; and Monica Melanchthon, *The Lutheran Churches in Africa: Realities, Tensions, Strengths, and Deficits*). In the midst of all these tragedies the church has offered itself as a space of healing and salvation. On the other hand, the close connection of the church with the tribal structures of traditional African society brings with itself not only the merits but also the problems of tribalism into the church structure as such. Some further issues that have been felt in African ecclesial formations are related to the role of women who make a decisive contribution to church life but are often excluded from the hierarchy. Also a strong clericalism could be found at the higher levels of church organization, while at the local, congregational level the role of the elders, both men and women, is decisive for the life of the community.

Asia

In the case of Asia, particularly of India, the latitudinal eschatology was clearly framed by three interrelated issues. One was the caste system in In-

dia, of which the Christian church has not exempted itself. The second, and closely related to the first, is the immense poverty that so much characterizes southeast Asia, even while this region has had the highest rate of development and even opulence (the Asian "Tigers"). And the third is the minority status of Christianity, not to mention the almost negligible presence of Lutheranism in the whole region.¹⁶ In the midst of these three enormous challenges the Lutheran churches of Asia have placed themselves ambiguously in relation to all. These three are the defining *eschata* of Asian society. They are indeed the yet insurmountable limits to a new existence. The response to these issues has been, is and will be revealing the churches' capability to address themselves to the promises of the kingdom. And there is enough indication that the churches of Asia are indeed aware of these challenges and have, albeit tamely, started to address them.

In so far as the caste system of India is concerned, the church has been at once herald of a new community of equals transcending caste divides while its structure often reproduces and benefits from the system it criticizes in theory. In relationship to the great divide between rich and poor it is indeed the case that the Christian churches in general and Lutherans in particular have had, notably in post-colonial India, quite an important role in diaconal services to society in general. However, it has been frequently observed that insofar as the churches have served as vehicles of foreign aid, it is the case that often this aid vitiates its internal structures and creates a chronic dependence on these funds. Nowhere else has so much concern been expressed over structures of power within the churches. In Asia, more than anywhere else, the ambiguity of what financial aid can accomplish has come to the surface. Finally, the minority status of Christians in general and Lutherans in particular has allowed for the church to situate itself as a distinct voice within the social and multi-religious context, as the herald of a world to come. At the same time, however, this minority condition also places the church in a vulnerable position. It often brings as a response the drive toward being the mirror of society, a chameleon in the environment, instead of salt of the earth.

The ambiguity of the position of the churches in relationship to these three challenges is a unique combination of conflicting eschatological visions. A transcendental type of eschatology is certainly not absent in Asia due to the great influence that European missions of a pietist persuasion have had on the churches since the 19th century missionary efforts. An historical, longitudinal, and immanent eschatology inherited from European mentors is relevant,

¹⁶ Yet it is important to remember that in the case of these countries with such enormous population, a low percentage rate is still numerically significant. Reaching barely 2.6 percent in India (25 million—here I am ignoring the claimed 9 percent of unbaptized "Christians"), this country alone has more Christians than the combined population of the Scandinavian countries.

particularly in the context of interfaith dialogues, but does not seem to be strongly represented in the daily life of the church. The latitudinal perspective is, however, the one that sets the church in the relationship to the kingdom in a way that addresses the major challenges of Asia. The crossing of these divides of caste, class, and religion has been and continues to be the great challenge of Asia, its nemesis and its promises.

III

The Church and the Kingdom

As I have intimated, in the *Communion, Community, Society* study eschatology was not raised as an explicit theme and was also not clearly defined. This in itself is telling. It means that the church was never defined in any strong sense from the point of view of its own consummation/fulfillment, no matter how this consummation was to be framed. The words of the Catholic modernist Alfred Loisy, at the beginning of the 20th century, are well known: "Jesus foretold the kingdom, and it was the Church that came."¹⁷ His words were really not meant as sarcasm. Yet a sense of irony remains unavoidably linked to his observation. And the question reads: when the proclaimer became the proclaimed, what happened to his message? When Jesus Christ became the object of the proclamation what was made of the coming of the kingdom that he so passionately announced?

Some general observations are pertinent here. First, it seems that on the whole there has been a fairly clear awareness that the proclamation of the kingdom is not being realized within the church but that the church, in proclaiming the proclaimer necessarily points also to the content of his proclamation as indicating a reality different from the way we know the world and in it the church to be. However, this pointing to the content of the proclamation of Jesus, the kingdom of God, has not always been explicitly formulated. In my reading, it was almost totally absent in the European context. It was somehow present in the North American context either as a goal toward which we are progressing (the longitudinal type of eschatology) or as an extra-sensory reality (the transcendent type). In the Southern hemisphere the importance of the eschatological proclamation of the kingdom grows significantly, yet not necessarily in any systematic manner or in a consciously construed theological argumentation. But it is definitely the case that a different eschatological frame delineates itself, which has been here defined as a latitudinal or topological type of eschatology.

¹⁷ Alfred Loisy, *The Gospel and the Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), p. 166.

However, what seems to be important in the discussion about church and eschatology in the context of the Lutheran communion is first the importance of the historicizing of eschatology as it happened in the Western world (North Atlantic) since the time of the Enlightenment. Such historicizing allows for the church to be viewed as one of the historical institutions that along with others plays a particular role in furthering the move toward the goal or *telos* of history, but is in itself not the soil on which the kingdom is growing. This understanding of the relationship between church and history is arguably quite Lutheran. It does follow the same intent of Luther's *Ständelehre* in leveling the worldly dignity of the institutions of *oeconomia*, *politia*, and *ecclesia*, within a modern context.

A second important contribution to this debate follows some of the insights of the previously observed interpretation. But instead of emphasizing the chronological or longitudinal dimension in eschatological thinking it stresses the spatial awareness. In this latter, latitudinal sense of eschatology, the other world is always framed as a world *other* than the one that demarcates *my* world, in the many senses that space and local can acquire. This contribution seems to me to be the most important lesson to be gathered from the churches in the Southern hemisphere. The themes that they raised as basic for their ecclesiological self-understanding were themes that suggested many ways in which the *eschata* could be interpreted and the church should stand in relation to these *eschata*. The problem with this interpretation is that it often becomes selective in what the decisive boundaries might be while dismissing others or revealing some blind spots (like the question of race in Latin America, the question of sexuality in Africa, or the gender issue in Asia). It is precisely the idea and practice of the communion which might allow for a cross-fertilization among these different visions of the end, compensating exactly for these blind spots that particularity is prone to reveal. The merit of this study is to rethink eschatology also in topological terms, beyond the exclusivist temptations of a neo-doceism of fundamentalist or existentialist persuasion (the danger of transcendent types of eschatology) or to an eschatology yoked to the Western idea of progress (the danger of the longitudinal type).

Living and Structured Spirituality

Joachim Track

A new interest in spirituality is characterizing the Lutheran churches. This was the impressive experience at all the consultations. In the worldwide Lutheran community a new understanding of the significance of lived and structured spirituality is evolving, and of worship as the center of the Christian faith. A fresh emphasis is being placed on the celebration of Holy Communion as an experience of communion with God and with each other. The "church of the word" is developing a new sensitivity for the significance of signs, symbols and rites. There is a searching for and experimenting with new forms of worship and meditation, old forms and ways of spiritual practice are being rediscovered, not only in one's own tradition but, in an ecumenically open quest, also in other Christian traditions and other religions.

Lutheran liturgy and spirituality have acquired movement and color. There appears to be a new understanding of the challenge to give to faith and to the church a form and structure relevant to the different contexts. There is doubtlessly a change here. Is this ground for rejoicing at the new riches of forms of access to faith, and to the experience of faith and its modes of expression? Is this change an expression of a worldwide cultural change, away from a culture geared to listening (and reading), towards a visually oriented culture, and the "experiential society"? Is it an expression of a new turning to religion and religious experience? How does the church of the Word accommodate this new orientation towards religious experience, rites, symbols and images? Does the "Lutheran identity" change with this new attention to form? Are the Lutheran churches worldwide really on the right path here?

Processes of Transformation and the Rediscovery of Religion

Although individual situations differ widely, especially between the North and the South, our world is increasingly being defined by the victorious progress of the scientific and technological civilization and the process of globalization associated with it. This seems to be the inevitable direction in which the world is moving. All over the world humans are fascinated by the associated promises of growing wealth, increased options, the variety of what is on offer and the growing possibilities for individual structuring of life and success, as well as the freedom which goes with it. But it is not only a question of fascination but also one of survival. Those who do not join have no chance. The economi-

cally weak countries are held in a stranglehold by the economically strong countries. Profits are growing as the number of unemployed are increasing. We are living in a world which believes that these unjust differences are needed if the economies are to function. Those who are not potential business partners drop out of this world. They seem to be uninteresting and worthless.

This world is oriented towards progress. Nonetheless, this orientation goes hand in hand with a peculiar sort of disillusionment, not only in the countries of the South which are paying the bill for this process. We were told this quite expressly during the consultations. The consultation in Sweden showed most clearly that the countries of the North are not really all that happy. We appear to have reached the end of this century-old dream: the dream of progress, of indefinite growth of wealth, happiness and equal rights for all in a humane world. Our way of life is full of risks endangering the environment, the social life within and between societies, and that of future generations. We live in a world which is depleting resources which it does not pay for, and for whose protection and sustainability it does nothing or too little. We live in an unreal world in which we continue to obscure the true conditions and costs of life.

It is not surprising that, at the end of the 20th century, religion has returned.¹ The significance and consequences of the worldwide return and orientation to religion are difficult to estimate. Faced with this turning to culture and religion, cultural anthropologists and sociologists have spoken about the beginning of "de-secularization." Following a wave of rejection and explicit criticism of religion there seems to be a new need for religion. This is happening in the context of a return to one's own culture, one's own country and people in a world which is growing ever more confusing and complicated.² The rapid transition to modern times, and within modern times, leads to a new searching for identity, cultural values, meaning and personal consolation. The immediate cause is probably the disillusionment with the possibilities of changing social systems and creating a new, humane society. We are suffering from reform-fatigue and, in view of our experiences, we no longer trust in the effectiveness of our reforms. This is linked to a new appreciation of religion as the place where direction can be found, and new spiritual possibilities can be discovered. Two factors are probably working together: On the one hand, this religious departure is an escape into a beautiful beyond, or into fundamentalist unambiguity. Because the outside world appears to be so inhospitable people seek salvation and happiness in religious uplift, in spiritual experiences, in a departure into the esoteric or a flight into fundamentalist unambiguity. There

¹ In view of this new turning to religion which may possibly hit Central Europe a bit belatedly, cultural anthropologists have spoken of "God's revenge," cf. G. Keppel, *Die Rache Gottes* (Munich/Zurich, 1991).

² Cf. Jürgen Habermas, *Die neue Unübersichtlichkeit, Kleine Politische Schriften*, vol. 5 (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1985).

is much insecurity involved, and in the sects this can take on absurd forms. On the other hand this new departure is also the expression of new insights, and good experiences with religion as a power which gives direction and security, and opens new possibilities for life.

This turning to religion is happening all over the world. But it has also become obvious that, in Europe, this development is happening "belatedly." There is a new interest in religion while the process of secularization is continuing. Are Europeans still too well off, or, concentrating on living in Europe, have they simply not yet noticed what is going to happen? The growing suicide rates, especially among young people in the Nordic countries, tell a different story.³

For the Christian faith and the Christian churches it is a novel situation that even there where such a religious awakening is happening, they are not much in demand. After nearly two thousand years they again find themselves in real and immediate competition with other religions and religious movements. It was clear in the contexts of Latin America, North America and Europe that the "historic churches" are not of immediate interest when there is such a "return to religion." This is a challenge to the Lutheran churches.

That the Lutheran churches are developing a new sensitivity for spiritual practices is part of the trend of the times. However, it is more than a mere "fashion phenomenon." It is high time that the Lutheran churches remember that the Reformation was a movement that developed its historic power through its spirituality. This fact has to be emphasized and explained in the present context, also in a critical acceptance and further development of one's own tradition. This new worldwide sensitivity for a faith which can be experienced and lived, for a spirituality which is living and structured, is a sign that the churches have accepted the challenge.

This raises some questions: It is not clear how the two trends fit together, the growing auto-dynamics of modern times dominated by economic factors, and the new turning to culture and religion. Does religion merely remain for personal development and the private sphere? The relation between Christian faith and culture will have to be re-examined.

Does the world need Jesus Christ? God's humanism which has revealed itself unambiguously in the love of Jesus Christ, has captured our hearts (2 Cor 5:14). But will the people listen? Will they let themselves be touched by God's mercy and philanthropy? What can a Christian minority achieve, very small as it is by global standards?

There is a growing longing for ways and forms of access to God and to one's own self, for symbols and rites that provide meaning, for orders to structure

³ The development in Europe between progressive processes of secularization and the new interest in religion would merit its own study.

life and for directions. In a time of crisis regarding what is feasible and possible in society and politics and of threats to our world, hope for liberation and consolation grows from "inside" which leads to a new, holistic identity. This gives spirituality its dynamics and it is hardly surprising that the most diverse forms and groups are on offer. There are many possibilities of gaining influence, there is a "gap in the market," and a great demand that needs to be satisfied. But this is also dangerous. Religion is the area in which people are most vulnerable and open to seduction. The whole of human existence is at stake. If, in the midst of the openness and danger of life and the search for its meaning, religious interpretations can be offered which go right to the depths of our self, such religious interpretations and promises of salvation can gain great power over people in their understandable longing. To err and give oneself over to false desires and hopes is both dangerous and fraught with consequences. Images of God, concepts of humankind and ways of dealing with the world, including political action, are shaped in this way. Therefore all depends on the answer to today's longing for spirituality. What can the Christian faith "promise" here, beyond cheap placebos and recipes for quick fixes, beyond fundamentalist oversimplifications and limitations? This raises for us the question of the contribution and the specific form of an evangelical, Reformation-inspired spirituality.

Between Tradition and New Departure

In order to form a first opinion about the various changes taking place in the Lutheran churches, it is worth reflecting on where we come from, and on what constitutes Reformation spirituality.

The historic success of the Reformation is largely due to the fact that the Reformation's understanding of justification expressed itself in a new, comprehensive spiritual practice.⁴ The proper form of evangelical spirituality is determined by three basic theological insights:

- The conviction that where it is a question of human salvation, God acts, and God alone, became, for Luther, one of the decisive basic insights in his "Reformation discovery." We are justified for the sake of Christ who suffered for

⁴ Luther gave a specific religious meaning to the word "pious" which, in everyday language, was used in the sense of "useful," "decent," "upright." For Luther, "pious" describes the proper relationship with God. Since the 17th century, piety has become a central concept in "Protestantism." Schleiermacher examined the pietistic tradition critically, and used the term piety to describe the subjective side of religion, the specific expression of the "feeling of absolute dependency" in an historic religion. The new discipline of the study of comparative religion in the 19th century drew up various typologies of piety. They found differences between prophetic and priestly piety, piety of the law and piety of grace, this-worldly and other-worldly piety, external and internal piety.

us, forgives our sins and gives us righteousness and eternal life. The ground for justification is not our offer but God's turning to us, God's love. In a world characterized by sin, the primary expression of this love is forgiveness. This is a comfort for humans in the anguish of their consciences. They can rely completely on God's grace and promise. From this grow trust, joy and freedom which now dominate life. Spiritual practice in the sense of a certain way of life, or the keeping of particular religious rules can therefore in Reformation understanding never be the condition for faith. The Word of the gospel is not a Word which first requires acts and deeds or forms of piety, but a Word which creates reality. On the basis of the promise of this reality we can and should lead a new life, in the growing certainty that God's righteousness is shaping our lives.

- For Luther, the event of justification is an event of relationship. God comes to humans in Jesus Christ. He wants to be present in humans in the power of the Holy Spirit. The life changes which occur in justification can be understood as changes of our relations with God, with ourselves and with the world. It is a change which happens through the person. Unlike the medieval concept, faith, grace and love are not understood as objective gifts of salvation which are "poured into" human beings in the sacramental act, and enable them, in the power of the Spirit and by their own decision, to bring alive in their spirituality their relationship to God, and their obedience to God's will. According to Luther, the Holy Spirit becomes effective as personal encounter and presence in the human person. This personal event is one which totally concerns the individual but nevertheless is beyond his or her control, just as the love of another person is complete gift and offering to the other as a person, encompassing but not to be owned by the person.
- The human person thus acquires an ex-centric existence. S/he is taken out of her/his self-relatedness. Ultimately, this event is uncontrollable and unobservable. Evangelical spirituality knows that it is completely and permanently reliant on the Word and on the sacraments as the ways in which God makes Godself present. This spirituality is always oriented towards the Word which comes to the human person from outside, and penetrates the innermost parts, heart and conscience. The good works are the consequence and fruit of faith. Although Luther emphasizes these good works as fruits of the faith, he rejects every attempt to use, explain or observe these works as proofs or tests of faith. This would be the sly, under-handed human attempt to highlight oneself and one's achievements, in order to gain God's acceptance. The Christian way of life must not be the attempt, by some special religious practices, belatedly to provide a proof of righteousness. Being a Christian, and being faithful and pious in one's Christianity, is proved by the way in which our actions are characterized by love.

Against the background of these basic insights, the way in which Lutheran spirituality expresses itself develops under the following aspects:

The basic position and orientation of evangelical spirituality is characterized by the experience of conscience, and the comfort for conscience which is promised in justification. Luther's transformation of the practices of piety of the late middle ages must be seen in this context. This practice of piety was characterized by the concepts and sequence of *lectio*, *oratio* and *contemplatio*. Luther changed this sequence by starting with the *oratio*, the prayer as initial request for composure and illumination. This is followed by the *meditatio*. The *lectio* is included in the *meditatio*: Scripture is read and meditated upon. The *contemplatio* is replaced by the *tentatio*, the testing of the faith in tribulation. It is no longer the mystical contemplation of God which is the aim of meditation but the experience of God in tribulations. It does not mean immersion in oneself. In listening to the Word which comes to us from God we can and may bring our situation to God. Faith proves itself in the midst of life.

In a particular way evangelical spirituality is scriptural spirituality. The liberating experience of justification has come from Scripture. Therefore the appropriate form of spirituality is a turning to Scripture. Luther continually emphasized this against the claim of the direct knowledge of God's Spirit by the left wing of the Reformation. The permanent concentration on the Word of God serves both faith and life, through personal reading of the Bible, or in family worship in which the father of the family reads and comments Scripture, or in public worship, or in studying the catechism which is the basic and generally accessible exegesis of Scripture. The form of the Protestant worship service, with its participation of the congregation in singing and prayer and sharing Holy Communion in both kinds is an expression of this basic conviction.⁵

The emphasis on the dignity of the individual in his or her relation to God is part of evangelical spirituality. The promise of justification leads to personal experience and assurance. Luther does not intend to individualize or privatize the relation with God; he emphasized repeatedly that the individual believer is called into the community of the believers. But justification only comes alive in the faith of the individual. It is the individual who has to understand the seriousness of sin and the greatness of God's grace. The emphasis on the dignity of the individual finds its visible expression in the Protestant way of going to Holy Communion. Seriousness and trust, the knowledge of sin and

⁵ The Protestant side has given such an important role to music and church music as an expression of their piety to balance the hiddenness and inaccessibility of the event of justification. Music does not replace the only visible modes of God's presence, which are Word and sacrament, in a high-handed and attention-seeking way - or at least it ought not to do so, according to Luther.

forgiveness become visible in the celebration of Holy Communion. This dignity is linked to the question of the individual's worthiness. Over against the "external" medieval Catholic spirituality associated with the receiving of the sacrament, Protestantism stipulates that people should only come to Holy Communion if they are internally ready for it, and come with a plea for forgiveness. External church discipline is replaced by inner preparedness and worthiness. Hence it is understandable that the evangelical doctrine of Holy Communion emphasizes the forgiveness of sins. Although the eschatological character of joy, and the communal nature of Holy Communion are also seen to be important, it is the emphasis on forgiveness which is the main determining factor for shaping piety. Together with the emphasis on the individual and his or her dignity, evangelical spirituality is also characterized as a spirituality which dares to confess its faith in public, and fight for the truth it has discovered.

An understanding of the need for orders and the freedom for the individual structuring of piety is part of evangelical spirituality. While the whole picture of Lutheran spirituality is characterized by orders – seemingly necessary for regulating the basic structures of hearing the Word, and for the sake of love – there is a freedom and complexity of forms of personal spirituality, which sometimes even become impersonal and unrecognizable. This freedom finds its particular form in the structures of spirituality in the family, in the house group, in family prayers, in personal reading of the Bible and daily periods of silence. But it can mean that religious practice is lost in the freedom and the multiplicity of forms.

Finally, evangelical spirituality is characterized by the turning to the world as God's creation. Since we cannot obtain salvation by our works we need not flee from this world into particular religious groups and forms. According to Luther, being pious shows itself in the way we are guided in our actions by love. According to the classifications and distinctions made in the two kingdoms doctrine such loving actions mean that, on the one hand the Christian accepts and fits into society and the creative orders of this world where s/he has tasks and obligations, be it as father of the family or in a profession or in political life. Within these orders s/he will do what is just, and thus bring the good fruits of faith. On the other hand, Christian love becomes real in personal life when it becomes a life for others characterized by the readiness to forgive, to renounce one's own rights and to suffer for the sake of love.

Although this new direction of spirituality has become very effective, it still leaves some basic queries and uncertainties, some of which arise out of the transformation processes of modern times. These questions concern the relation between spirituality and experience, between spirituality and form, and between spirituality and distinctiveness

Spirituality and Experience: The Lutheran doctrine of justification emphasizes that the event of justification takes place as gift to the individual.

God's justifying judgment has to become certainty and experience in faith. This produces a tension between the nature of gift and human participation. Although the Reformation, theologically quite correctly, emphasized the fact that the experience of faith and of spirituality is a gift, it still managed to find an appropriate place for human participation which corresponds to self-experience. Human beings always search for possibilities of assuring themselves of their faith but Lutheran spirituality did not give a noticeable place to active self-experience. This meant that many new attempts were made to find possibilities of self-assurance, in penitence, in the seriousness of Holy Communion, in references to conversion.

Spirituality and Form: In Reformation spirituality, certain orders are prescribed, including orders for specific forms of religious life. While these orders should be based on Word and sacraments beyond that no further specific forms of spirituality seemed to be necessary. The question of a structure of spiritual practice which would be appropriate to the gospel was not sufficiently considered. And no thought was given to the possible form and its changes according to the situation that would be the appropriate expression of faith. Therefore Protestant spirituality often has concrete forms which depended on accidental developments and actual constraints.

Spirituality and Distinctiveness (Identity): Lutheran spirituality is recognizable by the way faith in its worldly life obeys "civic justice."⁶ A form of spirituality evolved which has strongly influenced modern life and its understanding of work and the world. At the same time, however, we find a spirituality without a clearly defined identity. It is understandable, therefore, that during the course of history, both in the discussion of controversial theological opinions and in inner-Protestant discussions there have been many and repeated quarrels, and specific separate forms were developed in Pietism and in modern spirituality.

At the beginning of modern times, Pietism and the revival movements have tried to find clearer answers. In a novel way they turned to the themes of faith experience, and the distinctiveness of the Christian existence. In personal experience one had to gain and test the assurance of the promised salvation. Conversion is described as experience: experience of sin and guilt, of ultimate perdition and of being placed in a situation of decision making; it is the experience of the breakthrough of the gospel as a crisis into one's former life and the gladdening experience of a new birth. Christian existence must become visible in the spiritual practice of the pious community and their blameless life-style which is characterized by keeping the commandments and renouncing the world and its temptations.

This "spirit" was particularly obvious in the consultations in Asia and Africa, filled the missionaries and influenced the growing Lutheran churches.

⁶ Cf. *Confessio Augustana* XVIII, pp. 7-9.

The "emigrants" from Europe to Latin America and North America also followed the same tradition.

This kind of spirituality is increasingly subject to a crisis. What had happened earlier in Europe now appears as a worldwide "crisis experience" of Lutheran spirituality. Changes in the patriarchal family structure, and in life's rhythms and cycles to which the forms of spirituality were connected, lead to a disintegration of traditional forms of spirituality. Spirituality is increasingly being individualized. At the same time, in the course of modernization, the challenges and demands to the Christian way of life are changing, in the areas of individual and social ethics. Can Lutheran spirituality only occupy a position of opposition to modernism, or, while critically accepting the challenges, is it its task to develop and structure a Lutheran spirituality which is both appropriate to, and critical of, the times and the context?

The present awakening in the new sensitivity for spiritual practice, and in the renewed appreciation of worship owes much to the pietist tradition because it understands faith to be experience, and emphasizes the communal nature of faith against all attempts at individualization. This was particularly stressed in Africa. In the organization of worship services, especially in India and in Brazil, it was clear that the experiences of faith also need symbolic and ritual representations. What is new, however, particularly in the churches of the South, is the rediscovery of their own context, and the attempt at producing their own forms of spiritual practice including the religious experiences arising out of their context. New, also, is the struggle for a Christian way of life, for "worship in the world," for the distinctiveness of the Christian existence. Breakthroughs are imminent here. In the area of individual ethics (e.g. partnership, marriage, family, same-sex relationships) traditional values, which used to be seen as the characteristic marks of Christianity, still apply. A thorough discussion and re-formulation of these ethics is still outstanding, in terms of the changed social situation (e.g. structures of work and family life). In the area of social ethics meanwhile, a change is beginning, promoted particularly by liberation theologies. During worship at the consultations, the movements and stages of the Christian faith were illustrated in an impressive way: the gift of communion with Christ, the experience of his presence in Holy Communion, the communion with God and with each other opened up in it, the communion with the world, the sending into the world. There was a very clear bias towards the integrity of creation, for justice and peace. Spirituality and life-styles belong together. This is an holistic spirituality.

Contextuality and Universality of the Gospel

After the disappearance of the pressure of the opposition between East and West, a new preoccupation with one's own people, one's own culture and reli-

gion is becoming most evident.⁷ This puts the churches of the South in a difficult position. Recently one heard frequently that Christianity is the religion which had helped to shape Western civilizations and is still shaping them even if it now is slowly fading away due to secularization. Therefore it seems to appear in other cultures and civilizations, shaped by other religions, as a "foreign religion." Universal claims are considered very critically.

The Christian faith stands in the tension between universality and contextuality. From its beginnings Christianity was trans-cultural and related to culture. The emerging church became a church of very different cultures: Jewish, Greek and Roman. The factual reason for this was on the one hand the incarnational dimension of the revelation as God's self-disclosure in history and, on the other, the eschatological dimension of the event of revelation in which contexts are opened up to the creation-given universality, and to a future beyond this world. The gospel speaks to people in their concrete situation promising them liberation and salvation in it. In each concrete situation, the gospel opens our eyes to our common basic condition, the God-willed destiny of all people to be the image of God, to live in freedom, justice and peace. This creates the gospel's proximity to every culture and characterizes its trans-cultural nature. But the gospel is also the foolishness of the cross, the offence and scandal, and strange to every situation. Faced with the "old world" it points to God's acts, to the power of love in all its powerlessness, to the promise of a future in which this world, fading and temporary though it is, after its end must be preserved for life in the new creation. Both, God's nearness to people in their context and, despite this proximity, the continuing strangeness of the faith have always been emphasized by the Reformation.

The attempts to develop new forms of worship and of lived spirituality stand in this tension. The churches of the South, again following the prompting of liberation theology, and distancing themselves critically from the traditional (missionary) and habitual forms of Christian life, are searching for their own historic forms of being Christian. And this process shows that the reference to contextuality does not only mean "translating" the gospel into different contexts, but that the contexts themselves, and the experiences in the contexts, have an exegetical significance of their own. It is essential that the churches not play off the universality and the contextuality of the gospel against each other but put them in relation to each other. They are appropriately related to each other when the one is not just seen to be the limitation of the other. The relation has to be seen and devised in such a way that contextuality and universality are understood as both condition for, and fulfillment of the other. The explication and the realization of faith in context can lead to a new understanding and a changed practice of the faith. Different situations, dif-

⁷ Cf. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations* (New York: Touchstone, 1998).

ferent social and cultural conditions and possibilities can open our eyes to new understandings and forms. Exegesis in context corresponds to the opening of the context for the experiences of faith in other contexts, in the knowledge that the eschatological character of Christian truth transcends every context. Such an opening can appear as the insight into the limitations of one's perception of one's own context and of strange contexts, and can lead to a common and mutual history of learning, perception, witness and action. This basic view makes it important for the communion of Lutheran churches to be mutually aware of the exegesis of the gospel in context, and to be open to other perceptions.

Reconciled and Reconciling Spirituality

The study "Communion, Community, Society" has shown that "Lutheran churches in transition" are structuring and living spirituality in a new way. The living Word of God is represented in various ways. If everything were to be reduced to mission or social commitment, the Lutheran churches would be the poorer for it, and "comprehensiveness" would become a cliché. In conclusion, in view of the disagreements regarding the understanding of spirituality and comprehensiveness, and the question of a Lutheran spirituality, a few systematic points of view will follow.

First: One of the great misunderstandings, mostly among committed Christians, arises from the way they understand the relation between love of God and love of their neighbor. Many believe the love of their neighbor to be the concrete expression of their love of God which is a confusion between concrete expression and consequence. Love of the neighbor is the consequence of love of God, not its concrete expression. Out of love of God grows the capacity to accept others and ourselves, to love others and ourselves. Love of one's neighbor finds its concrete expression in turning to others, in acting in love in one's personal existence, in the community of faith, in society. The concrete expression of the love of God is the lived, explicit spirituality in the form of meditation, prayer, contemplation and confession. The love of God just like the love of the neighbor requires concrete expression and an historic form. Spirituality as contemplation and composure, in which the human person finds and expresses his or her relation to God and to him or herself, needs its own particular times, its own forms and its own practice. For spirituality as the structuring of the whole of life, and for spirituality as religious practice in special forms, it is true to say that when we do not give spirituality a special form, special times and spaces for practicing it, the underlying convictions and attitudes are threatened with extinction. A faith that is not structured, is simply thought and exists only in one's mind risks being blown away by the wind.

Second: Lived spirituality brings movement into our own lives, into the way we deal with other people, into the congregation and into society. Out of it grows the right to worry about a special form of spirituality or, if you will, about one's soul. Without a clearly defined and self-regulated inner life there can be no clearly definable public life. Without a lively inner life we lose ourselves and the possibility of leading a responsible life. Spirituality therefore always has its individual form while, at the same time, appearing as a common spirituality. Like all of life spirituality depends on interpretation and tradition, on community and common practice. Lived spirituality requires language and forms. Individual spirituality can only thrive where it meets structured forms of language and expression which the individual can adopt, and to which he or she can relate critically and constructively. Just as we need other stories and other people in order to be able to discover our own story and our own self, so spirituality requires given forms, tradition, witnesses and examples.

Spirituality is always linked to its own institutionalization. Without the link to the communal practice and its institutionalization, individual spirituality cannot survive, just as in life we can only survive together. A free-floating spirituality beyond common forms and experiences will dry up in periods of draught and tribulation, can easily become law and degenerate into an instrument of magic. But it is also true that spirituality which is only practiced in traditional and fixed forms loses its liveliness. Traditional forms of spirituality need to be developed in an individual and lively way; they need new impulses, the appropriateness of the structures has to be reviewed, and a critical debate with the individual spirituality established.

Third: We welcome the structuring of spirituality into explicit forms, the call to look for new possibilities of shaping worship, for new forms of pastoral care, of counseling, of keeping certain times of silence and encounter, but this does not mean that the concrete implementation of spirituality in its explicit forms can be opposed to our responsibility for the world. This is particularly clear in the evangelical understanding of the relation between action and contemplation. This is not just the general anthropological insight that there have to be times of action, of self-determination, for going out and for turning back. Rather, Luther makes it clear in his re-definition of meditation that in the conversation with God, in prayer, the world is not left behind but the perceptions of the world in all their horror are brought before God. The experiences of action are included in contemplation, just as action without thought and prayerful faith to direct it is pointless and soon grows tired. This helps to overcome the false alternative between political and pious. Faced with the great challenges and complexities of our situation with its many disappointments, the freedom and ability to struggle for the preservation of life, for the creation of justice and for the practice of love in our society can only grow out a living spirituality. Yet, only the person who has dared to go out to

fight for justice and reconciliation, and has been wounded in the process, can understand in all its depth what it means that, in every worship service, we are turned back into human beings reconciled and encouraged by God.

Fourth: A spirituality which derives from the justification faith and is influenced by it, is a reconciled and reconciling spirituality. It has to be rediscovered and highlighted today. We call evangelical spirituality a reconciled spirituality when it lives by and in God's reconciliation, lets itself be renewed by it and finds its form through it. Evangelical spirituality is a spirituality which lets itself be determined by God's righteousness and "Yes" to us. Thus this spirituality is liberated. Its primary characteristic is not pious effort but thankfulness and joy, joy because of grace. Reconciled spirituality is a spirituality which can rejoice at God's "Yes," and rejoice before God (just as David played and danced before his God). It is a joy which does not seek its own success and happiness at any price, but which, in the midst of all suffering and disappointment, and despite all resistance, knows that it is upheld by God's love, and by the hope in it which is offered to the whole world. But we also call this spirituality "reconciled" because it reconciles humans with themselves. Justification is the insight that we can do no greater favor to us and others and to the world than to accept and enjoy the love of God. This includes letting ourselves fall into God's love. When I enjoy God's love I discover that, in all my limitations and dangers I am worthy of God's love, I am loveable.

This spirituality becomes a reconciling spirituality. On the basis of God's "Yes" I am able to be reconciled to other people. This provides the basis from which I can turn to others, take note of them, take them seriously and accept them in their otherness. This paves the way for a new life together, a Christian existence which works for the realization of forgiveness, acceptance and solidarity in society. Wherever this Christian existence, this worldly spirituality, is lived in the world, it becomes increasingly distinctive. This distinctiveness does not mean an unambiguity which legally prescribes a certain life-style, and no longer allows everybody their own history with God, their own measure of what is possible. This distinctiveness will appear where people apply the basic insights of the gospel to their public responsibilities. The worldly spirituality of the Christian therefore becomes distinctive not for its own sake, but in the service of others. Christians need not prove their identity by a clearly defined life-style or by continually asking themselves what makes them distinctively Christian. Regardless of any worry about their identity, which was given to them once and for all by God's "Yes," they can start an open learning process.

The Church as Institution

Dietz Lange

In current sociological terminology, an institution is any form of social life that is molded by regulatory mechanisms installed to guarantee the reliability of vital functions. Customs, rites, all kinds of unwritten laws as well as organizations, legal codes, and the sanctions they carry are institutions in this sense of the word. Perceived in this way, institutions can be found in all cultures and all religions. As a matter of fact, cultural anthropology has contributed a great deal to giving the concept such a broad range. For the purpose of the following deliberations, however, a narrower definition appears more feasible. We shall deal with organizational and legal structures explicitly determining the social living conditions of a group of people such as the church.

The guidelines along which the Christian church was organized during the early centuries are an amalgamation of religious exclusivism and some of the basic principles of Roman law underlying the structure of the Roman Empire. This became obvious especially after Christianity had become the official religion in the 4th century, closely cooperating with the emperor in solidifying its dogmatic and institutional framework. The understanding of the church as an institution thus developed survived, by and large, the demise of the Roman Empire—which allowed the church to become independent of the state—as well as the Reformation's fierce attack on Roman Catholic institutionalism. It became part and parcel of the worldwide missionary effort, in spite of Luther's rediscovery of the New Testament idea of the priesthood of all believers. Thus Christian preachers more or less unwittingly exported a crucial element of occidental culture along with their faith. This observation is indispensable for understanding the widely differing perspectives from which the church as an institution is being viewed today in different parts of the world.

Analysis

Asia

A catchword frequently used at the regional conference in India was de-institutionalization. For a Western visitor, this was at first quite baffling. How could a church possibly function without some institutional structure? Was this not an anarchical delusion? It soon became apparent that while these questions contained a grain of truth, they were completely misleading without a sufficient understanding of the Indian context.

Christianity in India is a tiny minority religion in a predominantly Hindu culture. Hinduism is institutional only in the broader sense of the word in that it has temples, priests, religious customs and feasts, and the like. But it lacks a centralized structure and dogmas. Rather, Hindu spirituality permeates all aspects of everyday life. Being polytheistic, Hinduism tends to be inclusive rather than exclusive, in spite of its harboring some fundamentalist groups. As a result, by and large, Indian society considers Christianity as a foreign religion, closely associated with the institutionalized cultural grid imposed by the detested colonial power of which the church's structure seems reminiscent; a view apparently supported by the present Indian government. Popular resentment at times has erupted into violence. No wonder then that in a church struggling for survival there are strong tendencies to get rid of any trace of hierarchy. In Lutheranism, they seem to gain additional plausibility by its doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. Another consequence of this precarious situation is the disproportionately large role of non-baptized Christians in Indian society.

Closely related to its minority position is the fact that Christianity today appeals primarily to the low castes and the casteless: the Dalits. In connection with present-day liberation theology, this has led many church people, particularly grassroots workers and intellectuals, to identify with the Dalits in such a way as to conceive of the church as the broken body of Christ which is equated with a movement of the poor. A movement is spontaneous, revolutionary (in the broad sense of the English term), as opposed to petrified institutions which resist change and thus perpetuate injustice. In this connection it was mentioned that the Indian churches are major landowners. The social goal of those favoring a movement is to abolish the caste system (which the church has sometimes adopted) in the name of equality of all humans before their Creator. In this vein, some speakers envision the tiny Christian church transforming the whole of Indian society into a community.

Such is the complex background of the catchword de-institutionalization. It is further complicated by the fact that the Indian churches are still heavily dependent on their Western counterparts, which are by nature institutional. This collides head-on with national pride—a concept frequently referred to at the conference with regard to a seemingly quite different field, namely a self-contained economy as a means of escaping economic domination by the West. So, while aid from the Lutheran World Federation is still urgently needed, it is at the same time resented as a possible device for tutelage.

This situation may explain, in part, why little was said about the structure of the Lutheran church. This seems all the more remarkable as the tension was palpable throughout between those pleading for a movement and the representatives of the institutional church. Nonetheless it was never spelled out concretely and constructively. Even less was to be heard about the institutional implications of the church as *communio*, which is constituted by

Word and sacrament. This was not due to a traditional Lutheran neglect of all matters institutional, as the specifically Lutheran element was not very prominent in the contributions.

Theologically, this means that a problem haunting Lutheran ecclesiology almost from its beginnings is being aggravated by the circumstances. This problem concerns the relation between *communio*, i. e. the communion of Christians in faith with Christ and with one another, and the institutional church. They were often seen as mutually exclusive: Christianity vs. "churchianity." Neither did there seem to be any middle ground between the institution and the movement formed by the small community of an *ecclesiola in ecclesia* which in turn appears to be equated with *communio*. Thus the heritage of the pietistic mission is being translated into the terms of liberation theology, leaving open the question whether or not solidarity is claimed with each and every movement struggling against the *status quo*.

It may not have been pure coincidence that it was a delegate from Taiwan, one of the more westernized tiger states, who set the Reformation doctrine of the two kingdoms against this Indian view: *Communio* has to do with our relationship to God, while community (as well as institution) concerns the human, often all too human, social life of the church. Nonetheless, it seems doubtful that this doctrine should only represent specifically occidental values since its roots go right back to Jesus' rebuke of the Zealots in ancient Palestine.

The polemic against hierarchy was widely shared by representatives from other Asian churches (such as Malaysia). A particularly relevant case in point is Indonesia where that polemic acquires a totally different meaning. It is true that the colonial past has left its scars in Indonesia too. Nevertheless, the primary problem appears to be an autocratic tendency engrained in the indigenous culture itself, which is duplicated in the structures of the church. The constitution of the church provides, for instance, that the bishop who is answerable to the synod is at the same time its president. This makes criticism of him very difficult. But this provision seems quite in line with what many church members expect leadership to be like. In addition, the state is opposed to religious institutions becoming too democratic and frequently meddles in the internal affairs of the church—appointing bishops, for instance. Being a minority religion, Christians have a hard time preventing such interventions. The situation became even more severe after the end of the conference as violent clashes between the Muslim majority and Christians have occurred in many parts of Indonesia, with little sign of the government's willingness or ability to restore peaceful coexistence.

Africa

In many countries of sub-Saharan Africa, Christians form a sizeable percentage of the population. This has to do with lively a sense of mission in the

churches, which has its institutional corollary in the fact that in many countries each congregation has its own evangelist. Due to the continent's vastness, however, the tremendous cultural differences and language barriers even within a single country (take Congo, for instance), and the sad state of the infrastructure, churches are facing enormous difficulties. There is often rapid growth but little exchange between different churches, even within one denomination such as Lutheranism.

In addition, African churches still suffer from the ill effects of the longstanding link of Christian missions to colonialism. Ruthless efforts to eradicate African values (to "rescue" the people from "paganism"); the superimposition of patronizing foreign rule which at independence left African countries with no viable political structures of their own; Western-style free enterprise breaking up traditional social structures—these have left their mark, contributing to the outbreak of tribal wars, the rise of exploitative autocratic regimes, corruption, and laziness. Western economic imperialism and paternalistic development policies continue to this day.

The mainline churches have been trying hard to shed their colonialist image. Inculturation has indeed made tremendous progress. What is more, those churches often are the most important elements of a civil society, engaging in human rights movements against dictatorial rule, mediating between warlords, sometimes even suffering persecution. In many places, they are getting the state off the hook as regards social services. But they are often paying the price, by tending to become just another kind of non-governmental organization. Close cooperation often makes them uncritical of governments. Internally, the relationship between evangelism and social work often remains unclear. Above all, the social role of the churches is closely tied to their continuing dependence on churches in the developed countries, which is not only economic but extends to the kind of programs supported. Self-sufficiency as a goal seems remote.

The lack of infrastructure, of personnel and resources, and information technology threaten the unity of the church, in some places even its survival. There are countries in which a pastor has to take care of so many small and widely scattered congregations that s/he can reach some of them only once every two years. Meetings of pastors are few and far between. Wars and natural catastrophes force the churches to improvise, making them fire brigades instead of providers of a permanent framework. All this contributes to a discrepancy between the relative wealth of central church organizations and the poverty of remote rural congregations. There were even hints at corruption in some church circles.

The problems of infrastructure and the resulting lack of exchange are closely intertwined with the pervasive tribalism. Actually, allegiance to the tribe is a great strength of African culture. Family ties, generosity, community spirit have been means to surviving colonial rule, and they remain the indispens-

able social texture. "I am, because we are—we are, because I am." This view distinguishes them from the dominant individualism of the West. In the church, too, community has always been basic, long before Western communitarianism. It is intended to give visible expression to the communion of saints, especially by means of the Lord's Supper. Yet there is another side. Tribal allegiance not only furthers internal cohesion but also division and even conflict when dioceses are organized along its lines, bishops elected according to tribe rather than capability, the mobility of pastors and church members reduced. Loyalty to tribe often seems to precede loyalty to faith.

There were interesting suggestions by African participants as to how these potentially dangerous tendencies could be counteracted. On the basis of the fundamental Christian belief that in Christ all Christians are equal and that therefore his church is one in this belief, there were reminders that the institutional structure of the church cannot be reduced to community. Societal elements are needed to form bridges across the chasms formed by exclusive communities, such as exchange of pastors from different dioceses, ministry teams, jointly operated seminaries, sharing of information. It was also stressed, that all institutional elements are worldly, not sacred. They are not to be identified with the communion of saints, even though they are required for its becoming a social reality.

In spite of the strong communal element, most churches are being operated from top to bottom. This may in part be due to the fact that the priesthood of all believers, though paramount in the Reformers' view of the church, was rarely practiced even in the mother churches. This deficiency is reinforced by the African tradition of tribal chiefs as well as by the educational gap between the clergy and a laity that does not know enough about the church's constitution. There are elements of the priesthood of all believers, to be sure. The center of power in the church usually is the synod, and the bishop is elected. There is, however, a tendency to re-elect him time and again. That makes for a concentration of power in his hands and for immobility. Encouraging signs for change are an emphasis on empowerment of church members that was frequently reiterated, and the firmly established tradition of lay leadership in some churches such as the Mekane Yesus Church in Ethiopia.

Lay leadership can and frequently does also become the thin edge of a wedge for influences from Pentecostal and charismatic groups as well as from the independent churches that often teach a health-wealth gospel of U.S. American vintage. These groups form one of the main challenges for the Lutheran churches today, appealing particularly to the poor and the young. There is an urgent need for an institutionalized indigenous theological reflection on this issue, so that Lutheran identity is not inadvertently lost to foreign and sometimes un-Christian tendencies.

Latin America

The Lutheran churches in Latin America seem to be very much in a transitional period. Most of them were founded by German immigrants in the 19th century. In a predominantly Roman Catholic environment where religious liberty had been granted only shortly before their arrival, Lutherans were forced into isolation (which was aggravated further during World War II when the use of the German language was forbidden by governments). In terms of organization they were linked to the German mother church for a long time, and for their social projects, they remain financially dependent on European aid to the present day. Under these conditions, it is understandable why inculturation, including the use of Spanish and Portuguese, has begun only recently and is still far from pervasive.

In terms of church organization, the German immigrants came from a state-church system. Congregational life in 19th-century Germany was very much pastor-centered, with little lay participation apart from that of parish clubs (*Vereine*) which were the great novelty of the day. Religion was (until recently) highly privatized there, with a mentality of paying one's fee in order to be served. This predominantly middle-class background is still very much in evidence in Latin American Lutheranism. Meanwhile, rapid social change has made that kind of structure increasingly obsolete. In Brazil, for example, the population was two-thirds rural as late as 1966; only 20 years later, it was two-thirds urban. In addition, a sizeable migration away from the coastal regions into the interior has been taking place. As a consequence, the rurally based Lutheran church is confronted with the challenge of adapting to hectic urban life, religious pluralism, and loss of traditional values and impoverishment. No less than a change of mentality is required, towards more flexibility, active lay participation, missionary spirit, as well as social engagement in highly volatile situations with extreme poverty, unemployment, drug abuse, and violence.

In this situation, both a new sense of identity and a corresponding new structure are called for. As for a Lutheran identity, the church is very much aware of the doctrine of justification by faith alone, often in a liberation theology version. Yet there was almost unanimous regret that this high theology is not being implemented institutionally. A deep concern could be felt about a dichotomy between worship and *diaconia*, as well as between the club and the grassroots models of the institutional church. Social work is largely being done in isolation from the congregations and often without adequately voicing its religious motivation. Reticence to talk about faith on the one hand and the chasm between the middle class and the destitute on the other frequently result in a failure to integrate the latter into the congregation. Rather, they are often attracted by the aggressive missionary zeal and the simple message of Pentecostal and fundamentalist groups. In addition, many young people do

not feel at home in traditional parishes, and as a result many Lutheran churches are not growing.

On the bright side of things, some very promising innovative institutional initiatives are in progress. First, a remarkable creativity is to be noted in trying to contextualize the liturgy. It is hoped that relating theological reflection to the social reality in shaping the Sunday worship service will contribute to closing the gap between liturgy and *diaconia*.

The second and potentially more far-reaching measure to be mentioned is an institutional reform that is underway in Brazil. The General Synod in 1994 adopted a proposal to differentiate ecclesial service as follows: pastoral, diaconal, catechetical, as well as a missionary branch which is to be newly created. All those serving in these fields are to be ordained and to have an equal share in administrative responsibilities. The idea is to create services in partnership, teams that do not necessarily have the pastor as their leader. Besides, lay participation in church life is to be greatly encouraged, even though it is recognized that this cannot replace professional services with specific skills, institutional continuity, and accreditation. In this way, it is hoped that a parish structure can be developed that reflects more closely the Reformation idea of the priesthood of all believers and at the same time responds more adequately to the requirements of contemporary society.

There remain problems on the national level. The Latin American churches were rarely accused of being governed hierarchically. On the contrary, their organization seems to be rather loose and decentralized. Sharing financial resources between rich and poor synods is a very recent achievement. Furthermore, congregations which often are very small are isolated by huge distances. This makes for a serious lack of communication and integration. The element of community seems to be highly esteemed; it appears to be viewed as the true reflection of the communion of saints (witness the prominent role ascribed to the Lord's Supper in church life). Nevertheless this emphasis appears to be made at the expense of the societal or organizational element. Apart from the external factors already mentioned, this may also have to do with a notion stemming from liberation theology that calls for direct institutional implementation of the essence of the church as it is conceived in faith. The doctrine of the two kingdoms does not seem to apply to ecclesiology.

North America

The national organizations of the Lutheran church in both the U.S. and Canada were created very recently (ELCA: the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, in 1988; ELCIC: the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, in 1986), with the conservative Missouri Synod remaining outside the fold. Originally, Lutheran churches were organized along ethnic lines. As Americanization progressed, furthered especially by the world wars, they merged into larger bodies so that

by the 1960s, the number of Lutheran church bodies had shrunk to just a few. However, tensions between high church and pietistic ecclesiologies have not been resolved completely. In Canada, the picture is further complicated by the cultural divide between the francophone East and the anglophone West. This is mirrored in the church where the West always had strong links to the sister churches in the USA.

All this has had an impact on the formation of organizational structure, even though its development was notably different in the two countries. In the United States, the first Lutheran immigrants, brought with them not only an aversion for anything reminiscent of the state church system but also a strong suspicion of hierarchy. A considerable number of them had sectarian links. All this made for constitutional checks and balances at the leadership level as well as a tendency towards congregationalism. This trend was reinforced by the huge waves of immigrants in the Midwest in the 19th century. Because of the immense distances and lack of clergy, they were not able to build a centralized church organization even though some of them, particularly the Swedes, favored an episcopal constitution. Even today, congregations are enjoying a high degree of independence. Especially in rural settings, they are based on close personal relationships, so that members consider themselves a family communion. In the cities, there is a growing sense of social involvement; churches are often organized as "repairers and restorers of the community around us."

The corollary of this trend is the lingering suspicion that the Chicago headquarters of the ELCA are a bureaucratic colossus aloof from the grassroots activities, in spite of the extensive traveling of the Chicago staff. There were few suggestions as to what should be done to improve the relationship between the various administrative levels of the church. One criticism was that on all echelons, there was too much management-style leadership and too little servant-leadership in line with the idea of the priesthood of all believers. An interesting step in the direction of correcting this may be the structural experiment of cooperative parishes. These share financial and staff resources, thereby evoking a strong sense of common responsibility for church strategy on the synod level instead of wealthy congregations simply making contributions to poor ones.

In Canada where the orientation towards Europe has always been stronger than in the USA, religion on the whole is both more private and more institutional, due historically to the initial dominance of the Anglican state church. This difference in background may be in part responsible for the Canadians' generally more benign judgment of their central church administration. As for the institutional standing of the churches in society, cooperation with the political powers was good for a long time; they were being listened to as a moral voice. Since the 1980s, however, this position has been largely lost. Secularism is having an increasing impact on society. Average worship atten-

dance is noticeably lower than in the USA, and there are churches that had to be relocated or even closed for lack of membership.

On the congregational level, Lutheran churches in the USA are very much concerned with numerical growth, completely in line with the economic climate in the country. This is being supported both by the strong religious orientation of American society (in spite of some highly secularized pockets like the Northwest), the natural competition of the tremendous variety of religious groups existing alongside each other, and last but not least by the growing attraction of charismatic and Pentecostal churches. However, denominational loyalty has been declining in recent decades, and church shopping is carrying the day. The insufficient activation of lay members about which there was much complaint may have to do with this trend.

It is interesting to note the use of the media in this context. Participants in the conference agreed that the church is only just beginning to exert its influence on the national debate on key social issues in the media, primarily in the form of strategically placed members, not at the institutional level. There was a strong concern that the church might fail to understand the language of mass culture, let alone speak it, and thereby to lose contact with the people. However, internally, the church does avail itself of modern media in a very efficient way.

Europe: Scandinavia

Of the three Nordic countries represented at the conference, Sweden has, after several decades of debate, recently terminated the state-church system. Understandably, the Swedish church will be preoccupied with the ensuing problems of reorganization for some time to come. Developments towards closer cooperation between the bishops and the General Synod are underway. Being a folk church with a high percentage of the population as its members, the Church of Sweden is in no imminent danger of disruption, even though society is very much secularized. From the Reformation period onwards, Sweden has been traveling a moderate course with a strong episcopal tradition and increasingly close links to the Church of England. Apostolic succession seems of paramount importance (the same applies to Finland). Yet, in spite of these high church traits and well-functioning institutional mechanisms, there is a palpable sense of insecurity, a fear of losing members as well as funds. Bridging the gap between the generations is therefore conceived of as a major challenge. But there are encouraging signs of renewal. Institutional forms of church organization on the regional level complementary to the traditional system of the local parish are being considered to make the church more flexible in urban areas. At the conference not much was said concerning the basics of our faith as a source of reform.

The other Scandinavian churches do not have the apostolic succession, nor do they consider it essential. Norway still has a state church. Administration has been gradually transferred to church bodies, but there is a perceptible tension between the National Church Council and the General Synod as their constitutional relationship is not clearly defined. Bishops (there is no archbishop) are answerable to collegial and synod bodies, but they are appointed by the government which is not even obliged to choose its appointee from the three candidates nominated by the church. Denmark legally has a folk church system but with features of a state-church, to the extent that being Lutheran and being Danish sometimes seem to become synonymous. The church is governed locally by the parish council and the pastor, regionally by the bishop in cooperation with a public official, and nationally by the minister of ecclesiastical affairs and the *Folketing* (parliament). Pastors are elected by the congregation but employed as civil servants. Installing a synod is being discussed but has not been implemented. In this church, everybody speaks for themselves; even the bishops' conference does not make common declarations on public issues (one outstanding exception: a unanimous statement against the persecution of the Jews by the German occupation forces in 1940). There was some controversy as to whether this system should be considered a church from below or a spiritual veil on secularism.

Europe: Germany

The German church is finding itself in difficult straits. The state-church system was abandoned in 1918 when the country became a republic. A church tax was introduced as a compensation for secularized church property. It consists of a certain percentage of the income tax to be paid by all church members, collected by the state for the church. State and church cooperate closely in the field of *diaconia* (hospitals, kindergartens), religious education in state schools, theological faculties at state universities, and chaplaincies in hospitals, prisons and the armed forces. All these remnants of the state-church system are based on the assumption of the Protestant and Roman Catholic churches being folk churches. For Protestants, however, this assumption is becoming questionable. With the reputation of the (minority) Confessing Church during the Nazi period being past history, secularization accelerated, resulting in a massive loss of members. This applies particularly (but not only) to the East where 40 years of Communist propaganda and intimidation have been largely successful. In this former Protestant heartland, only 20 percent of the population still belong to the church. All over the country, only a fraction of church members take part in Sunday services, and participation in church elections is shamefully low. Acceptance of the church by the media and the general public is declining, and even among pastors, uncertainty appears to be growing as to the content of the church's mission. In addition,

funds have been shrinking, due to membership losses and changes in the tax system.

Under the pressure of both secularization and financial constraints, serious efforts at reforming the organizational structure were undertaken over the last few years. There are two main types. The Munich model is largely guided by the question of how the church can sell its product, the Christian faith, more efficiently. Great store is being laid by market analysis, participatory structures geared to action, coaching, controlling, strategy, and so on. The follow-up project *Evangelisch in Nürnberg* (Being Protestant in Nuremberg) adds the spiritual point of view so conspicuously neglected in the original model.

The second type is the one of the Hanover church. It follows a pragmatic middle road between a deductive and a technocratic approach. Only Scripture and the sacraments are the indisputable basis of the church, while structure is to be handled with great freedom. Particular emphasis is being put on the intermediate administrative level, decentralization, activation of people of all milieus, and favorable presentation of the church in the media. Elements of management culture are being taken up on a semi-professional basis. Both of these reform models were being questioned at the conference with regard to their Christian foundation.

This being primarily a problem of the West, the East is struggling with the influx of Western individualism and materialism on the one hand and the Western structural elements superimposed with a certain lack of sensitivity on the other (such as religious education in the schools, army chaplaincies, and the like, which are being considered more as a burden than as an opportunity). In addition, the loss of the social function of the church being an island of liberty within an oppressive political system and the suspicion in the general public that it might be just another indoctrinator are serious impediments.

Eastern Europe

Ten years after the fall of the Iron Curtain, the Eastern European countries are by no means a monolithic unity—if indeed they ever were. Their churches are nonetheless grouped together here because of their common experience of Communist dictatorships and because of their forming a minority (even though in Estonia, Lutheranism is the largest church, comprising 10 to 15 percent of the population). In many ways, they have made similar experiences as East Germany: difficulties in adapting to a newfound independence and opportunities, in changing from confessing to established churches, in fending off the less savory aspects of Western culture, in defending themselves against suspicions of promoting another suppressive ideology, and not least from a brain-drain to the West (Slovakia) and consequent lack of qualified personnel. In some countries such as Estonia, however, public expecta-

tions with regard to the church are very high, especially as far as solutions to social problems are concerned. In most of these churches, the reconstruction of the institutional structure is still in the making or (Hungary), has only recently been completed. Russia is particularly hard hit. Lutheran congregations are scattered over a huge territory which creates stunning problems of communication. Many church leaders and pastors are German. Since there is but one seminary which has been in existence for just three years, it will take some time to overcome the language gap. Lutherans are considered as being German and, by the Orthodox Church, as a sect. Members are mostly very poor, many emigrate. So the task of the church is trying to provide a home in an evil world (Georg Kretschmar).

Lutherans in Roman Catholic countries of Western Europe

In France, there are two different Lutheran churches. Alsace-Lorraine is the only region with a sizeable Lutheran minority, apart from the Montbéliard area. It has close links to the state, almost amounting to a state-church system. Church administration is episcopal-synodical. It is not surprising that in a country with a highly individualistic tradition, a certain tension between personal piety and community life is reported. Charitable commitment is high but church organization rather loose.

Whereas these parts of France have a long Protestant tradition, the Lutheran Church in Italy was founded only in 1949 and gained legal status as late as 1995. It is largely an immigrant church, a home abroad. It is not organized along strict denominational lines; its roots include the Prussian Union of 1817 and Swiss Reformed churches. The present church came into being by a concrescence of individual congregations, so there is a strong congregational trend. Its immigrant character is further underlined by manifold relations to Lutheran churches in other parts of Europe which, among other things, contributes to its comparatively healthy financial situation.

Comparison and Evaluation

The differences in institutional structure between the churches under review are so stunning as almost to defy comparison. There are traditional folk churches with a supporting state church structure or at least its remnants, existing in a largely secularized environment and in danger of losing their Christian identity—and there are others that form a tiny minority of the population, struggling for sheer survival. There are hierarchical episcopal traditions and congregational structures, strong and weak lay participation, highly organized administrations and rather loose ones, community-oriented churches and very individualistic ones.

All of this, of course, can be explained by the respective contexts in which these churches exist and by the history they have gone through. It is a truism that different contexts require different models of church organization. Besides, Lutheran doctrine holds that the institutional side of the church is a worldly affair. In other words: the doctrine of the two kingdoms has to be applied to the church. Current skepticism with regard to doctrine concerns its distortions (for example, its being used to justify dictatorial regimes as in Germany and Chile). In its original meaning, the kingdoms are not the church and the state but two relations: the vertical one to God (faith) and the horizontal one to other human beings (love and justice). In this sense, the distinction applies also to the church as the communion of saints on the one hand and as an organization with rules and regulations on the other. The former is determined by our relation to God, but the latter is variable and to a large extent subject to circumstances and rational discretion. So a great freedom in the shaping of institutional patterns is bound to prevail. Yet at the same time, the church differs from all other institutions in that it is to serve the proclamation of, and living witness to, the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Word and the sacraments are the visible signs of this mission (*Confessio Augustana* VII).

The question around which all Protestant ecclesiologies revolve is how to implement this in such a way that the institutional structures of the church mirror this mission while at the same time doing justice to the contextual requirements for the effectiveness of its ministry. Who sets the agenda: the culture of which the members of a church are a part, or the gospel of salvation through Christ by faith alone? The Christian faith has to adapt to culture to a certain extent in order to be livable in a given society, but at the same time remain critical of the claims to autonomy that every culture makes. This question is relevant not only for the way the gospel is proclaimed but also for the way a church organizes itself. In either case, it is easy to decide in theological theory but extremely difficult in the day-to-day affairs of church life. This is particularly true today when there is a growing and general confusion as to "what the Christian treasure really is," as a self-critical participant in Chicago put it. So which criteria for a genuinely Lutheran church structure can be derived from the fundamental Reformation rediscoveries of basic Christian insights, and how do they relate to the pressing problems our churches are facing in the world of today?

Five criteria were named at various occasions in the consultations of this project:

1. *All humans are equal before their Creator.* This means that no kind of class or racial discrimination, overt or hidden, can be an element of the structure of the church.

2. *Christian life means to take one's cross upon oneself* (Mt 10:38). Ideologies of progress which sometimes seem to determine church polity in Western

countries contradict this basic statement of our faith. Efficiency and growth can be means but never ends in themselves. On the other hand, the broken body of a movement does not automatically represent the cross of Christ. It may be no more than a sign of actual powerlessness.

3. *The church as the communion of saints can be identified neither with its administration nor with the community existing in any one congregation, and even less with a nation or a tribe.* Rather, the question is, in which way the communion can transform both the institutional and the movement type of church, so that the one does not become a group of clerical bureaucrats and a legalistic impediment to the gospel, and the other a group of politicians from below, lacking a Christian identity. Rules and regulations of the institutional church are meant to provide justice in its worldly affairs; yet this justice should be in some way recognizable as being rooted in the love of God that it proclaims.

4. *The Protestant shibboleth is justification by faith alone, i.e. deriving one's existence exclusively from the forgiveness and grace of God mediated by Christ.* If this is what Christians live by, then social work, crucial as it is for the church's activity, is a consequence of Christian faith, not its starting point. The church is not just another social agency. Neither is social work a means for mission: Christian love does not instrumentalize people. The organizing center of the church is the worship service. The church is a herald first and then a servant. This implies that it should not aspire to take over each and every social service in a given society but rather serve as a forerunner, inspiring others and the state to join in the effort.

5. *As justified sinners, all Christians are equal in Christ* (Gal 3:28). The guiding principle for the social reality of the communion of saints therefore is the priesthood of all believers (1 Pet 2:9). They are all members of a body, with equal importance to the whole and equal rights, Rom 12:4-8; 1 Cor 12; Eph 4. This contradicts any kind of hierarchy that bestows a religious quality on the distinction between clergy and lay people. Nor is the priesthood of all believers compatible with the traditional setup in which members pay a fee (e.g. in the form of church taxes) in order to be served. Its corollary are decentralization of power and transparency, the formation of a network and of teams, an equal standing of functions such as pastors, catechets, deacons, evangelists. This is true not only for churches in democratic societies as the motivation for such a kind of institutional structure is not the need for some degree of inculturation but the identity of the Christian faith itself.

Seeking Justice

Karen L. Bloomquist

The centrality of justice in the calling of Lutheran World Federation (LWF) churches has been emphasized at many gatherings and through many activities of the churches of the LWF. (Take, for example, the theme of the 1990 assembly at Curitiba: "I Have Heard the Cry of My People.") How much, and in what ways, was this call for justice reflected in how churches presented themselves at these regional consultations? How central is it to their ecclesiologies—to their sense of what it means to be the church in society? How might justice be approached in ways that are more theologically grounded in what it means to be a communion?

Many theoretical understandings of justice have been articulated. One could begin by setting forth a definition or criteria for what justice is, and then to use this as a basis for critiquing these churches. However, not only would such a deductive approach be inappropriate, but imposing such standards from a privileged position would be itself unjust. If a given church, for example, is not visibly working for distributive justice or for greater participatory justice in its own life, it is all too easy and probably unfair, to judge it as unconcerned about justice. Using certain standards of justice to see whether a church "measures up" can lead to postures of self-righteousness not appropriate for churches in a communion rooted in justification by God's grace.

Instead, a more inductive approach will be pursued here, out of recognition that what justice *is* grows out of the concrete, lived experiences of injustice in particular contexts. Each context has its own history and calls for its own forms of address.¹ Justice is considered here not as an endpoint or goal (which is unreachable in history) but as a basic orientation, which affects how a church relates to its context, its own structures and practices, and its God-given calling. This basic orientation is reflected in a continual probing that asks of any situation, "what's wrong with this picture?" What is unfair or unjust in how relationships are ordered in it? What stirs up indignation, anger, or even rage? What cries out for change? Such a questioning posture is also associated with the prophetic (in contrast with priestly) or public (in contrast with private) dimensions of a church's calling. The point is that justice is not posited *a priori* but emerges in protest against particular injustices.² It partakes of what is required to rectify or redress a situation that is unfair.

¹ The approach used here is similar to that of Karen Lebacqz, *Justice in an Unjust World: Foundations for a Christian Approach to Justice* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1987).

² *Ibid.*, p. 152.

Such an approach to justice is consistent with and deeply rooted in the biblical witness. It is especially biblical narratives that communicate what God's justice (*sedaqah*) is about, namely, "right relationships" with God, with others in the community faith, within the wider society and world, and in relationship to the rest of creation. Stories of injustice themselves become revelatory glimpses of what the correcting of injustice entails. Justice is grounded in relationship with God, and how God has intervened in history for the sake of establishing justice, such as by rescuing (the exodus, for example), rebuking (such as through the Prophets), and setting forth conditions by which unjust situations are to be rectified (for instance, the Jubilee).

Most of the churches represented at these consultations would affirm that working for justice is part of their calling. But how central this is, what it means, and how it is lived out varies significantly. The important variables, in addition to the theological traditions and pieties that have shaped a given church, seem to be:

- Whether a church is composed of, or at least conscious of, being surrounded by those who directly experience blatant and pervasive injustices ("an identifying mark of the church?");
- whether the expressed injustices are rooted primarily in cultural, economic, or political factors ("the roots and fruits of injustices?");
- whether the church is in the majority or minority *vis-à-vis* other churches or religions in its setting, and in relation to the established powers ("salt or mirror of society?");
- whether the focus is on injustices within the church as well as in society, and is consciously reflected in a church's policies and structures ("justice through church structures?").

These factors interplay in complex ways to explain the different justice profiles these churches reflect. The following analysis will necessarily be limited to what the churches chose to share or reveal about themselves.

An Identifying Mark of the Church?

In India, in which Lutheran churches presented themselves as being "of the Dalits," the struggle of this oppressed group for justice characterizes the churches' struggle and identity as churches, to a greater extent than churches elsewhere in Asia. Even though most of the churches in Africa are also "of the poor," their justice profile was less sharply defined, with an emphasis on diaconal work that does not necessarily lead to ongoing work for justice. The emphasis in Africa on holistic ministry may heal the split between evangelism and *diaconia*, but this emphasis does not necessarily lead to more public address of social injustices.

In Latin America, many of the newer Lutheran churches have been developed among the poor and those of indigenous backgrounds (such as in Central America). They, along with older, more middle-class German-background churches in South America, are strongly oriented toward working for justice, especially ecumenically, and in regularly naming, confronting, and redressing the patterns of injustice that have and continue to shape the history of that continent.

Much of the North America consultation focused on injustices facing those in urban areas, especially African American and Hispanic communities, but also those (predominantly white) who live in rural areas.

Where the reality of injustice was least evident in how the churches presented themselves was at the European consultation, even though a number of the churches were from Eastern Europe where injustices and disparities with those in Western Europe are blatant. The injustices related to their having previously been a part of the Soviet bloc were sometimes referred to as background, but seldom figured prominently in how the churches were profiled, because of other factors discussed below.

The Roots and Fruits of Injustices?

Injustices are not homogeneous; they have multiple roots and fruits. What clearly is perceived as injustice in one setting, when transferred to a much different setting may not be the priority needing to be addressed relative to other injustices. How the different churches view and address the injustices they face in their own lives or in their societies varies greatly.

Economic injustices were the most pervasively named, or were most obviously present in many settings. The global economy was regularly "blamed" for these economic injustices, although corruption of those "in high places" was also sometimes cited. When analyses were laid out, they tended to be Marxist-inspired, and somewhat dated in relation to current economic developments. These analyses became more nuanced when community economic development was the focus of the church's activity, in India, Tanzania, Brazil, and the United States.

Political injustices were especially articulated in settings where Christians are clearly in the minority, and where they experience discrimination if not persecution. This also can be entwined with economic injustices, for example, involving land ownership, or rival ethnic or religious groups. In situations where political rulers are not accountable to the people but repressive of them, churches often feel powerless to address political injustices. This could be helped through external linkages of solidarity with other churches, although such public voices from outside can also complicate the church's tenuous situation, especially if the ruling regime associates this with outside intervention.

Cultural injustices are more difficult to talk about but may be the most insidious. These include the complicated ways in which relationships and expectations are structured on the basis of gender; or ethnicity, race, or caste; or dependency and self-sufficiency.

Some of the churches, particularly in North American and the Nordic countries, have made considerable progress in rectifying some injustices related to gender, so that unlike a few years ago, gender justice was not a significant item for discussion at these consultations. In some cases, the majority now studying to become pastors and theologians are female, with church structures and practices, liturgies and theology beginning to reflect this change. In most of the churches, however, male dominance is still the norm. The anger regarding this injustice was often just below the surface, with a sense that talking about this out loud with male church leaders present was too risky or unsafe. The wounds are deep. When women are grudgingly included because of an externally-imposed requirement (such as the 40-percent expectation at LWF meetings), it is with the assumption that the "culture" of the gathering will still be according to male-determined standards. In some churches, the decision to ordain women was based primarily on pragmatic rather than theological reasons, for example, because of the extreme shortage of pastors in the church in Russia.

Gender injustice is further complicated by other cultural injustices at stake. Insofar as gender justice is viewed as a Western or Northern agenda it can be viewed suspiciously by many in the South or East, as if it were an imposition insensitive to their own culture. But authentic cries for justice by women in that culture are thereby overlooked, and different cultural constructions of injustice end up being played off against one another. This is even more vividly the case around matters related to justice for gay or lesbian persons, which in some regions continues to be a taboo topic.

The powerful role that ethnicity, race, or caste play in who is included or excluded in a church, by its customs and practices, was unmistakable in a number of quite different contexts. Many African churches have been organized by missionaries along tribal lines—lines that still separate churches or dioceses from one another. The German roots of some South American Lutheran churches continue to be quite evident, and even more so in the Lutheran church in Russia. The church in Sweden struggles with whether new immigrants are in fact part of their church. All these and others face major challenges because of the overwhelming extent to which ethnic identities have and continue to define what it is to be "Lutheran."

In the "internal spaciousness" that was emphasized by some of the Nordic churches, in which personal freedom itself tends to become the common faith claim, what was striking was the lack of a sense of "external spaciousness" toward those in these countries who are not ethnically Nordic. Being ethnically Nordic is the presumption for being a part of the Lutheran churches

here. One gets a strange sense that the blood of ethnicity is more decisive than the waters of baptism. Strong justice commitments are expressed in statements, liturgies, and through the vast array of international diaconal work. However, the faith itself tends to be privatized in such a way that to share it with "outsiders" is felt to be a violation of the personal freedom and tolerance that is so highly cherished. Personal freedom and tolerance can be important for creating a climate of acceptance, but something more is needed, with theological substance, if the more insidious injustices in these societies and churches themselves are to be confronted and challenged.

Salt or Mirror of Society?

The discussion as to whether Lutheran churches are salt or mirror of their societies goes back at least to the 1970s when in-depth attention was focused on the influence of distorted understandings of Luther's "two-kingdoms" thinking in member churches.³ There was hardly any explicit attention given to "two kingdoms" distinctions in this current set of consultations, although residual effects of this probably underlay the reticence of many of the churches to engage with economic and political realities.

What seems to be the decisive factors affecting whether a church sees itself primarily as "salt" or "mirror" of society are (a) its relation to the established powers, and (b) whether it is in the majority or minority *visa-à-vis* other churches or religions in its setting. Large churches that are dominant in their societies tend to mirror those societies and its prevailing values. Seldom do they challenge the established powers upon which they depend. This is especially the case for the folk churches of Northern Europe. It also is increasingly the case in other parts of the world where, because of their institutional strength and numbers, members of the church are increasingly in positions of economic and political power in these societies. As this occurs, the churches' prophetic voice (or "salt") in these societies may become more mute. This was decried, for example, by one African bishop, now that Lutherans are in top government positions in his country.

The situation is more complex among churches in areas such as Asia. In most cases, Christians, not to mention Lutherans, are in the extreme minority in these countries. Because their societies have been predominantly shaped and influenced by other religious traditions, the "outsider" perspective that Christian beliefs and values provides, has the possibility of questioning or challenging what is going on in these societies. In other words, it is an oppor-

³ Ulrich Duchrow (ed.), *Lutheran Churches – Salt or Mirror of Society?* (Geneva: LWF, 1977).

tunity to be a kind of prophetic "salt." This, for example, is the profile of the church in India.

In many Asian countries, the church and Christians are eyed with suspicion by the governing powers. But the influence of Christians (in an individual and not organized ecclesial sense) tends to be greater than their relative proportion in these societies. They often are "grains of salt" in their societies, operating quietly to stir up a sense of what is "wrong" or unjust through their diaconal service to those most affected by injustices. More organized attempts to confront and change the injustices are difficult to sustain not only because of the churches' relatively small size but because of how suspiciously they may be viewed by the prevailing powers who may view them as "foreign" influences. Confronting injustice also is blunted because of the personal pieties that have shaped these churches, such that working for justice is more peripheral to how many of these churches understand their calling.

A much different kind of situation faces Lutheran churches in the pervasively "Christian" cultural environment of Latin America. Lutheran churches there tend to be much more explicit about embodying a witness that is distinct from that of Roman Catholicism, which historically has been closely identified with the forces of domination and oppression. (This also characterizes the Lutheran church in other predominantly Catholic countries, such as Italy.) At the same time in Latin America, there is considerable Lutheran cooperation with more liberating, justice-seeking activity of the Catholic church. This bifocal attention is undergirded theologically by linking justification with justice: those whom God justifies are empowered to seek justice, both within society and in the church.

The minority-majority factor and the relation to established power factor are at play with yet other variations in the Eastern and Central European churches. Most are still trying to adapt to a vastly different kind of relationship with the established political powers since the changeover from the Communist era. Not only has the relationship suddenly changed from hostile to friendly, but there also are heightened, at times unrealistic expectations for the responsibilities the church will assume in society. These churches could not, without great risk, speak or act publicly against injustices in society during the very period when Lutherans elsewhere were finally becoming more involved in working for justice. Furthermore, as minority churches in countries where atheism or other churches tend to dominate, and where many of them are struggling for their very existence as churches, personal evangelism and more privatistic understandings of the Christian faith tend to prevail rather than theological understandings that challenge injustices. But such faith enables members to live over and against the prevailing society's pains and injustices—and in this sense to be salt rather than mirrors of their societies.

Justice through Church Structures?

In the United States, the extensive and concerted efforts to become a more multicultural church were evident, in intentional organizational structures, programs, policies, and goals (a staffed commission, statements, strategies, anti-racism workshops, ethnic-specific programs and hymnals, representational principles, and so on). Despite these considerable efforts, there were frank discussions of how far short the church has come thus far in becoming truly reflective of the multicultural diversity of its society. African American members, for example, still continue to struggle to be seen as "fully Lutheran." Furthermore, those from non-European racial or ethnic groups who do join tend to be middle class. The church there is very far from being a church "of the poor." Here too efforts are made to redress this shortfall by funding and staffing strategies, programs, and initiatives.

There is a need for such intentional, structured efforts because of the theological premise that injustices such as racism and classism—which are *sin*—cannot simply be redressed through good intentions. But has the church membership as a whole been "converted"? Is the quest for justice at the heart of what it means to be the church? Do visible structures and programs, which convey a greater institutional commitment to justice, necessarily mean that a church has become more just? Structures can be important for focused work in redressing injustices, but are not in themselves sufficient.

Most of the consultations gave little attention to church structures, except where these were in the process of being changed. However, there were continuing laments that such structures are not just. Church leaders were often alleged to be too hierarchical, and of using power in dominating ways. This was especially expressed by women and other advocates of more just, participatory styles of leadership. As one woman put it, "The church serves tribal and patriarchal interests on the one hand, and international structures of injustice on the other." Such matters must be confronted. What a church conveys by means of its organized life also bears witness to or contradicts its commitment to justice in society.

Justice and *Communio*

In addition to considering the different orientations these churches have toward justice, consideration needs to be given to the difference that *communio* would make in quests for justice. This wider scope for looking at and enacting justice seldom came up as these churches presented themselves. When injustices were discussed, it was with reference to their own societies. There was little consciousness of being related to those who are beyond the bounds of a

given church, with its geographic, confessional, and historically-based identity.

How do the different orientations toward justice referred to above affect how the Lutheran communion addresses injustices in its life together and in relation to the wider society? How might churches learn from one another? How might the unbalanced, unjust relationships of power among member churches of the communion be addressed? What would it mean to see justice much more at the core of a Lutheran ecclesiology, and in how we order our life together as churches and as a communion of churches? How might we talk about this, in the quest for greater communicative justice that goes beyond stereotypes (for example, of churches of the North and of the South) and that can make a difference within the communion and thus in relation to the world?⁴

Communio points to close organic relationships, mutual participation, and impartation of life benefits. In communion we are bonded together so that when one suffers, all suffer (1 Cor 12:26). The sharing of spiritual and material gifts, which is implicit in communion, cannot be isolated from examining the causes of inequities in wealth and joining with others to change such.⁵ Thus, for example, rather than workers in other countries being seen as threats to "my job," their lives become connected with mine through a *communio* reality that is even more compelling than that of economic globalization. Those whose lands are being exploited by transnational corporate practices similarly are connected to those who have access to these companies. A new sense of belonging to one another emerges, and with it, new possibilities for ethical action for the sake of justice.

Luther's explication of the *communio sanctorum* opens up provocative possibilities for pursuing justice on the basis of *communio*. For him, *communio* refers not only to the gathering of the people of God (*ecclesia*) but also the dynamic of participation in Christ, and with one another. Through the sacrament we become organically interconnected: we are "changed into one another."

... the sacrament has no blessing and significance unless love grows daily and so changes a person that [s]he is made one with all others. (...) For just as the bread is made out of many grains ground and mixed together, and out of the bodies of many grains there comes the body of one bread, (...) and through the interchange of his blessings and our misfortunes, we become one loaf, one bread, one body, one drink, and have all things in common. (...) In this way we are changed into one another and are made into a community by love.⁶

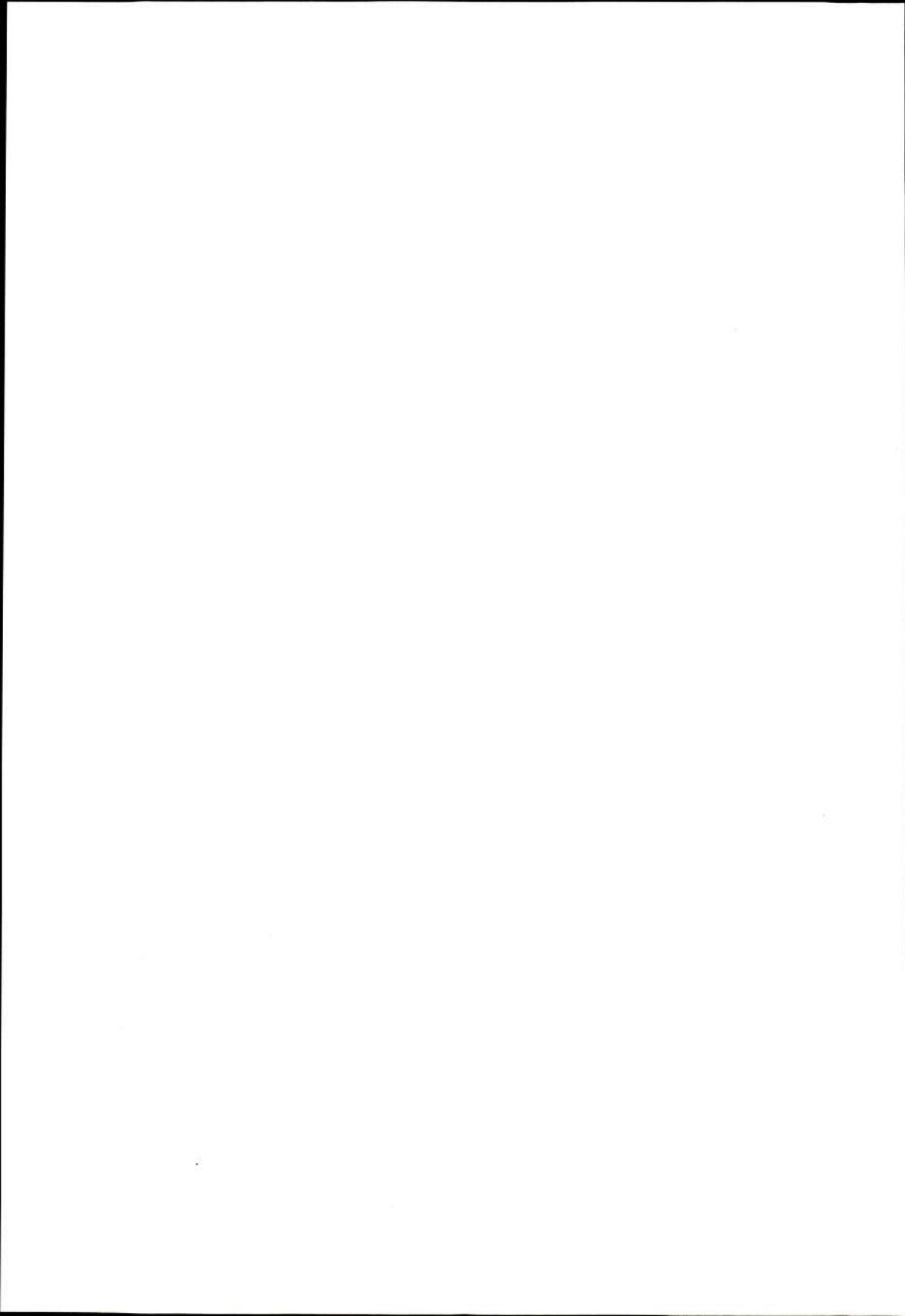
⁴ This is developed more fully in the working paper, *Engaging Economic Globalization as a Communion* (Geneva: LWF, 2001), from which the following paragraphs have been adapted.

⁵ Heinrich Holze (ed.), *The Church as Communion, LWF Documentation 42* (Geneva: LWF, 1997), pp. 13ff.

⁶ "The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ," in E. Theodore Bachmann and Helmut T. Lehmann (eds.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 35 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), p. 58.

This communion becomes an embodied sign of the interdependence of all of life. It establishes a foundation for a much different kind of justice seeking than one based on imperatives or goals, whose pursuit can lapse into moralism. We are freed from being obsessed with "doing right," or from trying to measure up, or acting out of guilt over the stark economic inequities in our world. All these can work against and destroy community. Yet through the gift of *communio* we are also implicated in a calling or task—to live out this reality beyond the church.

Communio has significant implications for how we are formed morally, for how we deliberate on matters of justice, for the expanse of our moral vision and scope of our action. The hard work still remains—to analyze carefully the multifaceted factors that lie behind a given injustice, and of organizing to hold the responsible actors accountable. But what empowers us to do so is the *communio* of which we are a part. This is lived out as those in member churches of this communion advocate and act out of a deeper sense of relatedness, responsibility, accountability to others in the communion, and through them, to the rest of the created world.



Service, Empowerment and Wholeness. *Diaconia* in the Lutheran Communion: Regional Variants and Determinants

Monica J. Melanchthon

This paper discusses the conceptualizations of *diaconia* within the member churches of the Lutheran communion and looks at initiatives to integrate them into the broader perception of the church's identity and mission, as well as the obstacles faced by churches which are trying to establish active links between *kerygma* and *diaconia*.

Diaconia?

Proclamation has commonly been considered the most important mark of the church. It is seen by many as the fulfillment of the missionary imperative to make Christ known to non-Christians by verbal witness. The common definition in many traditions is that the church is where the Word of God is preached and the sacraments are duly administered. It emphasizes the ordering of the fellowship in worship of the gathered congregation centered on the preaching and sacraments. But what about *diaconia*? For several reasons the *diaconia* of the church to the world of society and culture has often been placed on the margins rather than having been considered an essential aspect of the church in the world. This is augmented by the fact that the Lutheran Confessions do not insist on *diaconia* as a central mark of the church.

In any case two perspectives dominate the current discussions on *diaconia*: the first is the more traditional one where *diaconia* is understood as "charitable services" the church renders in society. This includes the various health services, educational services, and other social welfare services.

The second sees *diaconia* as *social diaconia*, which emphasizes the church's action to change the structures of society in the direction of justice.¹ *Diaconia* has also been defined as the "*ecclesial martyria* in the *diaconia* of the world's renewal,"² and as "revolutionary or political *diaconia*" as the church's task to

¹ M.M. Thomas, *A Diaconal Approach to Indian Ecclesiology* (Rome: CIIS, Tiruvalla: CSS, 1995), p. 9.

² Nikos Nissiotis, *Church, Kingdom, World*, p.116; p. 121 as cited by M.M. Thomas in *ibid.*, p. 10.

confront reactionary and negative forces, neutralize them and create counter forces.³ All these can be understood in terms of the church's intervention—as an instrument for social transformation linking proclamation of the gospel and *diaconia*. For those who espouse this perspective, *diaconia* plays a very central role in the mission of the church and essential to the identity and self-understanding of the church.

A combination of these variant definitions was operative in all the regions visited, although *diaconia* – as charitable services – was the most obvious and explicit form practiced by the churches. Participants from all the regions but more particularly from Asia, Africa, Latin America, and North America exhibited a very critical attitude to society and defined rather clearly the need to go beyond this. They called for critical participation in social structures, and for realism and vision, wisdom, and courage in the social responsibility of the church.⁴ But there was the recognition that while the church was aware of this need, there was not a sufficient corresponding commitment. Therefore, even in those instances where there is the awareness of a dialectical relationship between *kerygma* and *diaconia* and where the church is understood to be in service of fellow human beings in the name of God, there has been some difficulty in translating this understanding into effective reality or being carried out with integrity. This is a genuine struggle in the churches.

Regional Variants and Determinants

Christianity did not enter or flourish in the world in a vacuum. The socio-historical context that characterizes each region shapes faith. The cultural peculiarities of each region have impacted the church and many of the issues that confront and affect societies.

Asia: Diaconia as social and ecclesial transformation

Christians are, numerically speaking, a minority religious community in almost all of Asia, comprising only between 2 and 3 percent of the total population. How does the church interpret and respond to that fact? While acknowledging their minority status, the Christian community in Asia has not been preoccupied with its survival or sought minority protection. Ethnicity (in Malaysia, India, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Indonesia); language (in Malaysia, India); race (in Malaysia); and caste, an institution that structures social relations

³ Mathai Zachariah, *Inside the Indian Church* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 1994), pp. 11-12.

⁴ ELCA, Division for Church and Society, "Church in Society: A Social Statement on 'The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective'."

irrespective of religious faith (in India) – all these are very much a part of the identity of the churches. Yet, Christian communities in Asia seem to be struggling with the need to balance this with the moral purpose of their existence and their contribution to the larger society. This undergirds their self-understanding. The church in India, for example, has denied itself minority safeguards in the name of human rights to carry on its mission of evangelism and service to the whole people of India. This is an expression of its theological self-understanding: the church ceases to be communal by becoming a small part that sacramentally signifies the destiny of the whole.

Despite this resolve, the issues of caste, class, and gender are unresolved ones within the church in India and definitely within the Lutheran churches. Social relations of caste, religion, ethnicity, language, gender, and culture are based on the exercise of power, sometimes reinforced through the use of power. Both outside and inside the church, Indian minorities such as the Dalits, women, and other marginalized groups are articulating their grievances. To articulate a grievance indicates a degree of political awareness of a wrong, which the absolute exercise of power does not permit. What we witness today in India, as in the rest of Asia, in the increasing violence that enforces the maintenance of “order” in relations of caste, ethnicity, gender, religion, and so on, is the weakening of an absolute power which does not permit the articulation of a grievance. There also is a consequent blurring of carefully drawn lines of demarcation between groups. Despite the ubiquity of violence against the minorities, the celebration of individual experiences has led to the emergence of alternative discourses where the “truth” and validity of established structures, norms, and roles are being called into question. Minority leaders are calling for inclusion not merely in the interest of the minorities and their development, but also for regenerating and renewing the church and making it more meaningful and relevant.

The ideologies of globalization, economic liberalization, and the program of structural adjustment are redirecting contemporary agendas. Poverty is on the rise and the type of poverty visible in most parts of the world is not just a lack of material benefits, but a total poverty that is moral, cultural and intellectual, and transmitted through generations.⁵

Within the contexts of diversity and marginalization, the power of the few over against the majority, the exclusion of the poor and women, the type of *diaconia* called for goes far beyond the tradition of charitable *diaconia*. Much as this is needed, the need was expressed for a social and revolutionary *diaconia* to bring about a more equitable sharing of resources, and recognition of the humanity of the downtrodden. Mission has been affirmed as multifaceted with

⁵ Melanie Philips, “We Need to Reinvent Our Failed Utopia,” *The Observer* (London, 12 September 1993), as cited by Kenith A. David, *Sacrament and Struggle: Signs and Instruments of Grace from the Downtrodden*, WCC Mission Series (Geneva: WCC, 1994), pp. 8-9.

multiple concerns including verbal proclamation of the gospel, religious conversion, inter-religious dialogue for mutual understanding and peace, the promotion of social justice, and uplifting the marginalized.⁶ Mission has also been understood as fullness of life⁷ and as struggle for justice.⁸ Therefore, only when an individual or community experiences healing, wholeness, renewal, and transformation has mission arrived at its goal.⁹ From the voices heard in Asia, *diaconia* was understood as prophetic servanthood, sacrifice, and struggle, both collective and individual, and as an essential sign of the cross operative in society. To work for unqualified respect for the other, irrespective of class, caste, language, or sex, to promote the sharing of resources and sacrifice that includes unqualified justice, forgiveness, and reconciliation – these are part and parcel of the diaconal ministry of the church.

While this understanding of *diaconia* was voiced without hesitation, there was an expression of frustration with the formal structures of the church and society, which militate against change and transformation. Little was said with regard to the church's relation to people of other faiths and its cooperation with non-governmental organizations or other Christian denominations in bringing about such transformation. The crisis therefore does not seem to be methodological but spiritual, cultural and theological.

Africa: Diaconia as promoting wholeness

A community of servants called to practice charity ... those less privileged are taken care of. This diaconic work seeks to respond to the neighbor in need through activities which bring relief to orphans, widows, the lame, the blind, the weak, the old, street children and others in need. (Owdenburg Mdgella)

Regard the church as a place where they worship the Lord, serve the needy ones around them, and have fellowship with brothers and sisters across cultural and geographical boundaries. (Solomon Endashaw)

A community called to be prophets and advocates of society, speaking out against evils in society, rebuking ... practices of humiliation,

⁶ Lalsangkima Pachau, "Towards the New Millenium in the Study of Christian Mission," in Gnana Robinson (ed.), *Challenges and Responses—Church's Ministry in the Third Millenium: Implications for Theological Education* (Bangalore: ATC, 2000), p. 565.

⁷ James Vijayakumar, "Mission as 'Living'," in *ibid.*, pp. 535-553.

⁸ Deenabandhu Manchala, "Mission as Struggle for Justice: From the perspective of those who are denied Justice," in George Matthew Nalunnakkal and Abraham P. Athyal (eds.), *Quest for Justice: Perspectives on Mission & Unity* (Delhi, Nagpur, Chennai: ISPCK, NCCI, Gurukul, 2000), pp. 42-55.

⁹ Philip Hefner, "The Church as Well of Possibility," *Currents in Theology and Mission*, Volume 25, Number 4 (August 1998), p. 249. Also Monica J. Melanchthon, "Koinonia and Mission," in Pauline Smith (ed.), *LWF Consultation on Churches in Mission: A Report* (Geneva: LWF, 1999), pp. 109-18.

correcting leaders of all categories in society and giving warning signals to society regarding symptoms of corruption, the violation of human rights, peace, and justice and to correct these ills. (Owdenburg Mgdella)

Redemption of the whole of creation ... immediate environment and ecology at large. (Owdenburg Mgdella)

Africa is a polyethnic continent enclosing within its borders a large number of cultures and ethnic groups. Its traditional worldview, which emphasizes a cosmological framework and a holistic approach to life, actually would provide for equal sharing of power and wealth for the sake of the prosperity and survival of the community. Yet this traditional worldview is currently weak or maybe even lost in the "discontents" of modernity and globalization, ecological destruction, and increasing poverty. People's resistance needs to be reclaimed.

The principle of pluralism, in the sense of tolerance and respect for and rejoicing over the plurality of cultures, has become problematic in the course of developmental efforts in Africa. Population shifts and changes in status have resulted in people turning to cultural distinctions embodied in their traditions to resist what is perceived as a threat to the integrity, prosperity, and survival of the community. The mobilization around a group's identity has led to new "ethnic politics." The stakes include control of and access to power, achieving higher social status, or gaining community security. Changes in economic conditions have led to contention over rights to land, education, the use of language, political representation, and preservation of ethnic identity, autonomy, and self-determination. Standard developmental models have paid little attention to this diversity, assuming that functional categories such as class and occupation are more important than ethnicity or tribe. The civil wars that characterize many of the African countries stem from an inadequate recognition of cultural and ethnic complexities. Ethnicity is a determining factor in the nature and dynamics of conflict and plays a significant role within the church. This issue has not been dealt with sufficiently.¹⁰

Thus we have a context of polyethnicity, religious plurality, acute economic poverty, illiteracy, corruption in the state and the church, gender imbalance, epidemics such as AIDS,¹¹ and abuse of nature. *Diaconia* in this context calls for increased critical involvement of churches in these issues, which basically is not occurring despite the presence of large diaconal infrastructures.

¹⁰ Cf. Anna Mghwira, "The Church - a Blessed Institution? Critical Reflections," and Thomas Nyiwé, "The Church's Mission in Cameroon."

¹¹ Suprisingly, only the participant from Namibia, A. Hasheela, mentioned this urgent issue which is now in the forefront of many discussions on Africa.

Latin America: Diaconia as striving against exclusion

For myself as an Asian, Latin America represents the leader and model for struggles against oppression and discrimination, whose contribution to liberation theologies in Asia is quite significant. It was therefore disturbing to hear of the many changes taking place within the region as a result of globalization. People are being affected economically and socially, with the most vulnerable at the mercy of the market system. The ideologies of globalization and structural adjustment seem to have made people deaf to the immediate past and to anything that does not speak the language of efficiency. The prevailing economic model has subjected each of the nations on the Latin American continent to unprecedented pressure both from within and without, making it important to envisage how one might lay claim to the history of struggle and provide for better participation and inclusion of the excluded—women, youth, poor, unemployed, unskilled, indigenous peoples, gays and lesbians, those affected by HIV/AIDS, and others.¹²

The process of impoverishment intensified by the current economic model also influences the manner in which people of different ethnic origins relate to one another. This is a second feature of Latin America. Despite the many ethnic communities present, the Lutheran churches, in for example, Brazil, are mono-ethnic, primarily of German origin. Outreach to people of other ethnic communities is either not seen as important or is proving to be difficult.¹³ As Else Marie Wiberg Pedersen observes, the churches are aware of their diaconal role and yet in their striving to formulate a new identity, tend to exclude others who are not of the same ethnic origin or class.¹⁴ This is more obvious at the congregational level, although this does not seem to be the case with the diaconal activities of the broader church. The churches experience a strong tension between retaining their ethnic heritage, and being open to people different from themselves so as to express solidarity with them. As Richter Reimer stated, "to be a church in this situation could be nothing other than witnessing in the love of God with these people, creating possibilities of relationships of *diaconia* linked to *koinonia*."¹⁵

The Lutheran churches in Latin America seem to find an answer to this problem by seeking solace in the doctrine of "justification by grace through faith." While this sets them apart from other churches, it also places them in the world — for justification is understood as that which dignifies and redeems the human being from the many manifestations of death in the world.¹⁶

¹² Cf. Mario J. Yutzis, "Taking Stock and Looking into the Future."

¹³ "Ministries in Partnership: Proposals for the IECLB."

¹⁴ Else Marie Wiberg Pedersen, "Traits and Tensions in Ecclesiology."

¹⁵ Ivoni Richter Reimer, "Faith and Hope."

¹⁶ Gottfried Brakemeier, "A Vision for the 21st Century."

Therefore the diaconal activity of the church contains within it the element of the "prophetic." It is also "the action of the Spirit, in its discernment, sending and supporting, denoting thus a dynamic spirituality and one which is participatory in the needs of the environment."¹⁷

North America: Diaconia as rebuilding of community inclusive of differences

Economic growth and prosperity characterize much of the church in North America. This is reflected, for example, in the size and scope of its diaconal efforts. But behind this facade of thriving affluence, success, and efficiency are innumerable uncertainties and tensions related to economic status, race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnic, and religious plurality. A growing number of people are abandoning religion. The intertwining of these issues create complex and conflicting pressures, particularly for minorities. The importance of solidarity with the community is often pitted against fighting oppression (gender, class, sexual orientation, urban/rural, HIV/AIDS) both within the community itself and against the state. Individuals and communities within the church are experiencing the difficulties and complexities of maneuvering these often contradictory demands.

Lutheran churches in North America, like churches elsewhere have a very elaborate understanding of the function of the church. The church is "missional," repairing and restoring the world, "to be pro-active, co-creators with the God of solutions, of healings, binding up of wounds, of reconciling the privileged to the oppressed, of ending racism." North America came across as the strongest region in terms of its active engagement in social issues, its ecumenicity, and its commitment to becoming inclusive of diverse ethnic groups. The goal of the Lutheran churches is not just to be a multicultural church but a multicultural-constituted church, a church that can recognize plurality without forfeiting its integrity. This was clear in the emphasis on experience and contextuality and the necessity to cross cultural boundaries as an essential starting point for learning and doing theology.

However, to what extent has the church really wrestled with the issue of difference? Many, with all good intentions, want to minimize the differences between groups, between men and women, young and old, able bodied and physically challenged, black and white. They mistake the need to avoid discrimination based on difference for a need to deny the difference themselves. Equality is not possible between identical atoms; only different things can be equal. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) are far from realizing this ideal. So the struggle to do so has at least begun. Efforts are being made to increase the number of people of diverse origins within the church through its many

¹⁷ Pedro Puentes, "Reflections on a Latin American Ecclesiology."

programs, ministries, structural provisions, and the development of different liturgical resources.

While the negotiated acceptance of differences will be the essence of this church, negotiation will never produce a "definitive settlement"—nor should it seek to do so. Identity implies the establishment of limits—and limits generate tensions. This is as it should be. And though the various members of this church share a common humanity, this will never make them members of a single, universal tribe. It is the splendid and sometimes bewildering diversity of the human race that has its root in this common humanity. With the recognition of their commonality and oneness in the faith, the difficult negotiation it demands of them has begun.

Europe: Diaconia as making the church understandable in the world

Like North America, the many high-income countries of Europe are registering rather high levels of immigration. The majority of immigrants apparently are from developing countries. The existence of economic imbalances, poverty, bad governance, and human rights violations in many places are strong incentives to emigrate. Large-scale population movements and migrations in recent decades have caused dramatic changes in the demographic ratios and social and cultural mixes of people. Consequently, local populations sometimes feel threatened. Economic growth and welfare call for free and maximum mobility not only of goods but also of people within and between countries. This implies cultural diversity of an unprecedented magnitude that can be culturally and socially disruptive. This must be handled in social harmony and justice so that peaceful solutions might be found to resolve the inevitable tensions and conflicts. This is a major challenge facing the Lutheran churches in Europe today.

Former Communist bloc countries face the ensuing pressures of fitting into the European Union, the widening gap between the young and the aged (such as in Germany), growing provincialism, individualism, unemployment, economic disparity, and the ambiguities of postmodernity. Declining church membership, the financial crisis, and "weak identification" with the concerns of the people affect churches as they try to minister meaningfully. In contrast to the legacy of these churches which have historically reached out to people across their borders, *diaconia* was emphasized as service and intervention in local issues, with little said about the need for affecting global issues or policies. The pressures of modern Europe seem to weigh heavily on churches. The church seeks to become visible and understandable in its immediate context. *Diaconia* is here understood as intervening in society, to engage and counteract forces of economic deprivation, secularization, and marginalization.

Overall

Lutheran churches globally are aware of the importance of maintaining integrity so that their outer actions and responses might reflect the truth of their lives. This tension between being and doing seems to be at the forefront of ecclesiological discussions and in the functioning of the church. Consequently, diaconal work now seems to occupy a more central position in the ecclesiological debate in all the regions and constitutes a significant aspect of the church's identity.

Pluralism is an all-pervasive, enduring characteristic of contemporary societies and churches. Ethnic, racial, caste, gender, and religious identification are normal, often healthy responses to the pressures of globalization. Ethnicity acts as a trigger for violent conflict only when it is mobilized and manipulated to do so. Attempts at "*koinonia* building" by making all groups homogenous are neither desirable nor feasible. The most durable way to accommodate plurality is to create a sense of *koinonia* rooted in values that can be shared by all ethnic components of the *communio*. What these are needs to be explored. Such a sense of *koinonia* is best achieved if the concept of "church" is freed from any connotations of ethnic exclusivity.

Two Further Issues

There are two related issues to *diaconia* that came to the fore in the presentations of the churches. Both issues emerged particularly in Asia and Africa but also globally.

Diaconia in the context of dependency

Since *diaconia* is such an essential part of our faith and of the church's identity, churches strive to carry out *diaconia*, whether or not they have the resources. While churches have to some extent moved beyond charity, *diaconia* is today often used as a means of domination by creating relations of dependence between those who have the resources and those who do not. Partnership and equality in fully cross-cultural terms is still to be achieved. Dependency in political, economic, cultural, and even theological terms remains a bitter description of the relationship between the rich and the poor, between churches in the North and churches in the South. Although many of the churches in the so-called "third world" are formally free, they are still economically and culturally captive to the rich "first world." This kind of dependency is distorting and corrupting on both sides, and hinders partnership, equality and mutuality in mission between members churches, and has adverse effects on the receiving church.

Voices in Asia and Africa express frustration with the hierarchy that is created between them and those handling the funds that come from outside for various diaconal projects. Those handling the projects are often the middle-class community and modern organizations and institutions with an administration. Sometimes they are not apt to handle issues that concern the poor or the marginalized. In any case, a bureaucracy is created. The struggle for power, and the ambitions and jealousies among Christian leaders and workers, are causing divisions within the receiving church.

Interchurch aid is used in much the same way as international aid—to create “spheres of influence” and areas of economic, political, and cultural domination and dependence. This is particularly true of bilateral interchurch aid. We heard that besides the creation of a bureaucracy, there is over-centralization of church administration; structures are in place that exclude expert advice. In several countries, particularly those that are non-Christian, receiving foreign funds for diaconal work results in suspicion on the part of the government and the public (such as in India and Ethiopia). This dependency also decreases the motivation to raise local resources. It contributes to a widening gap between those with financial and decision-making powers and those who are the implementers of these programs, resulting in a bottleneck for efficient development.

There is a growing alliance between agencies in the North and progressive, middle-class action groups in the South in the struggle for justice. The criticism is that the churches are too inefficient, too reluctant to engage in social action, too authoritarian to be an efficient partner. Some call this a renewed form of the old charity approach but now from the agencies.

Representatives of LWF World Service mentioned the constraints placed on them by church structures. The upbuilding of the church or the body of Christ should be the goal of diaconal work. Churches and agencies should keep this as their goal and relate to one another in a manner that does not jeopardize the body of Christ.

When *diaconia* becomes simply a matter of efficient organization unempowered by the gifts and energy, disassociated from the upbuilding of the church or the body of Christ, it can no longer be Christian *diaconia*. It becomes another service operation like those in the world and those run by governments and voluntary agencies... The more interchurch aid becomes a set of donor agencies and aid receiving projects, the less it will be related to the upbuilding of the church... Unless interchurch aid *diaconia* is reintegrated with the life of the worshipping communities in all countries, it cannot be recipient of the true operations of God geared to the upbuilding of the church.¹⁸

This issue is hindering authentic *koinonia* between member churches in the North and those in the South. Also, churches and diaconal projects are

¹⁸ Paulos Mar Gregorios, *The Meaning and Nature of Diakonia* (Geneva: WCC, 1988), p. 23.

generally less effective as a result. Dependency on foreign agencies or churches for finances reduces the legitimacy of an organization or church in the local and national contexts. Such a dependency makes the organizations or churches vulnerable to political and other pressures, especially when they critique prevailing powers. In such cases, outside aid is counter-productive.¹⁹

How can "third world" churches cast away this sense of dependency and find their own potential? There needs to be a critical assessment of both economic and non-economic factors. Can "third world" churches be financially, culturally and theologically self-reliant in their *diaconia*? Financial self-reliance is important for their dignity and identity. Without it, the power in the relationship will inevitably stay with those providing the financial resources. Financial self-reliance of both partners is a prerequisite for a dynamic alliance based on equal strength. Institutional capacity building and financial self-reliance is central to a healthy relationship between churches.²⁰

Diaconia in the context of the local congregation

Confronting forces of oppression and serving the oppressed can be done effectively by local churches as they mutually support each other in the struggle. A diaconal structure should be based in the local church, rather than in the donor agencies or project networks. For *diaconia* to become a more distinguishing and essential part of the church, churches should guard against further specialization and the division of ministries where the diaconal activity becomes the exclusive preserve of a few specialists or specialized departments or organizations, either within or outside of the church. *Diaconia* is not a parallel branch of the church, but should review, question and revise the very essence of the church and its mission. As a methodology and tool for intervention, "participatory *diaconia*" challenges the notion of "spectator *diaconia*." With congregations involved at the grassroots level, the church has a greater chance of rediscovering its *raison d'être*. Such action also reduces imposition by an external agent. Instead, the emphasis is on dialogue.

Conclusion

A diaconal church is therefore at the heart of the contemporary redefinition of the church — in terms of a commitment to transform the world with the message of justice, hope, and reconciliation. *Diaconia* points to the work

¹⁹ Kunchala Rajaratnam, "Self-reliance in Mission," in V. Premasagar (ed.), *New Horizons in Christian Mission: A Theological Exploration* (Chennai: Gurukul, 2000), pp. 477-78.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 483.

of collaborating with God in establishing the reign of God in the midst of society. In the context of the many political, economic, and social issues that confront the society, churches are challenged to re-articulate an appropriate style of diaconal engagement as a way of confessing Christ today.

What is the nature of *diaconia* in the face of contemporary challenges in society today, especially for the Lutheran communion? How we respond determines the diaconal or missional character of the Lutheran churches and of their identity. For the unity of the church and the renewal of human community, churches are evolving an inter-contextual method, a multidimensional approach (charitable, prophetic and political). This new approach deals with the question of church unity in the wider context of the tragic divisions in humanity and of the increasing forces of dehumanization in the world on the one hand, and in the context of the growing interdependence in the world and of the general aspiration for unity of the whole of humankind on the other. An emphasis on praxis is enriching our understanding of the church, ministry and sacraments, stressing the horizontal, social and communitarian dimensions. What is emphasized is the church as a sign and the importance of the visibility and credibility of the sign. The ministry and sacraments are to build up genuine fellowship and community at all levels and promote as well as protect people's racial and cultural identities. The church belongs to this world, working towards the kingdom of God in building up here and now a genuine human community anchored vertically, under the guidance and operation of the Holy Spirit, resulting in a much richer concept of church. Here *diaconia*, including prophetic ministry and participation in the struggle for the empowerment and the wholeness of society and culture, becomes part of the essence of the church. How this is carried out will largely influence the church's identity and reformation.

Communio as a Vision and the Goals of the Church

Wolfgang Greive

What is the Church For, and What is Its Vision?

The Lutheran churches worldwide are in a state of transition. Great social changes are bringing pressure to bear on the role of the church in society, and the church therefore is challenged and reacts. The church establishes a relation with the new situation because, as *communio*—as community in relationship in Christ's discipleship—it always finds itself in a reciprocal relation with social and political reality. But which perspective is dominant? How does the church react; what characterizes its reaction? How relevant is its self-understanding in the different contexts? When it comes to the relevance of the church under the new conditions of the late modern world one should expect a new and deeper re-evaluation of its goals. But is this the case? In light of today's breathtaking process of transformation it is increasingly urgent to ask where the way is to lead, and what vision is guiding it.

It is said that the time of great designs and visions is past. For the sake of God and human beings, however, the churches have to communicate a vision. The faith of the church confesses the God who has promised a future to human beings. This promise is no utopia but a promise present in faith, love and hope giving a direction to life. Nothing was less helpful for the vision of the church in society than its own delusions of having a utopian faith and being the vanguard of humankind. The dismantling of utopian thinking has shown this clearly. It is very difficult, though, for the churches again to take seriously their own vision, and not to follow the spirit of the times and be content with only pragmatic goals. The more these goals are a question of the survival of the church, the greater the danger for the church to see itself as an end in itself. This only deepens the crisis of the church and the church therefore needs critical self-examination, to discover its true purpose. In situations of creeping or dramatic changes the goals and the leading vision of the church in the world have to be clarified fundamentally, and passed on contextually, not abstractly. Mere pragmatism is as unsatisfactory as an unworldly utopianism. This is the starting point for the following analysis of the responses from the churches, which clearly indicates the importance of the vision of *communio* for new models of the church today.

Are the Churches in Europe without a Vision?

It was remarkable that in the European Lutheran churches' answers to the new challenges the primary questions were not: "Who are we?" "Where are we going?" – important cybernetic guiding questions – but "Where are we?" In today's theology of the church, the leadership seems to use cartographic terms. What must we do in order not to disappear from the map? But nobody tried to work out where the way was leading nor, with very few exceptions, were any attempts made to sharpen the theological profile of the church. Vítor Westhelle worked this out very clearly.

It is interesting to observe that in comparison to what was the case in other continents or regions which this ecclesiological project researched, the question about the Lutheran ... identity never emerged spontaneously; when it was raised it was from the outside, by core-group participants. In other words, the question is not who is the "we," but where is this "we," what are its limits and borders.

This means that little attention is paid to the cybernetic guiding questions and that, in fact, the old model of the *Volkskirche* (the people's church) is still dominant. This is apparent because, for the Lutheran churches in Europe—despite their separation from the state and their acceptance of civil society—links with the state and ethnic elements are still decisive. Their primary concern remains alliance with the state and the people. The churches do not have the courage to stand in the *agora*, the marketplace of our time, with a newly discovered understanding of the "freedom of a Christian," and of the church as *communio*, and to offer orientation in the context of the pluralist and fully differentiated society of today. How the purpose of the church, which goes far beyond the purposes of the market, can be made visible and transmitted under the new conditions is not a primary or burning concern. But it is only on the basis of this question that the relation with the state and the people can be creatively re-examined and the changes in society can be taken seriously in a critical way. Only then will it be useful to ask whether the church is in a minority or majority situation, or with which groups and sectors of society it has contacts, without receiving only short-term and misleading answers.

The reflections from the Slovak church contain a theological emphasis on the social reality. In the context of the transition from a Communist to a Western society, they say that

In this context, our theology of the church must be centered in Luther's *theologia crucis*, the theology of the cross. For us in Slovakia, this means that we base our life and mission as the church not on being big and powerful, as size and power are measured by secular standards. Our "theology of the cross" does not, however, excuse us from the hard work of coming out of the isolation of the previous decades.

With the model of "the voice of conscience" the church shapes "the religious life and cultural development of Slovakia." The perspective in the East German minority situation is similar.

... the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saxony's motto is "being a church in the heart of society." We have to end self-marginalization and must not regard secularization as an irreversible fate. It is up to us to make our congregations more attractive, to strengthen missionary activities as well as religious education and our Christian social service. We have to intervene in society.

These goals of the churches in minority situations show a slowly growing self-confidence in the face of a diminishing role in society, which seeks a more certain theological understanding of its own identity when trying to be more attractive in society. Lutheran churches in majority situations, however, tend to try and find new structures through which to maintain their influential position more or less undamaged, and be present everywhere among the people, without seeking a deeper theological re-evaluation. Their model remains that of the *Volkskirche*. Here, for instance, is the official description of the Church of Sweden: "It is an open national church, which...covers the whole nation. Emphasis is placed on the occasional services like baptism and funerals. These are where the Church of Sweden [not in Sweden] comes into direct contact with the majority of the Swedish people, and when the description national church most truly applies." The church is naturally based on the Bible and on the Confessions, but no perspective for the reform of the church in the present situation is derived from them, or from a theological re-interpretation of them. There is no discussion of theological models which would inspire and direct and which are linked with the new realities. Such a discussion did not take place in Lund, either. Are the churches in Europe without any vision?

However, the new debates about church reform mainly held in Germany explicitly ask for new models. The heated disputes about ecclesial models show that this is a struggle to find ways of clearly and efficiently organizing the aims and purpose of the church under new societal conditions. The economic and cybernetic church reform takes the modern market seriously and sees the church as an enterprise with its own original goal: it is spiritual and religious communication on demand. The church responds to the consumers' wishes with its own offer, with its good news of God's love. The management of the church can only function if this goal is the clearly stated purpose of the organization. This approach contains the cybernetic questions but says nothing about the goals that lie beyond the purposes of the market. Neither does it mention the insight that the new market economy, the global markets, and the political bodies like the European Community are based on cultural pre-suppositions and foundations that are not self-generated. Therefore it is an elementary fact that the churches are perceived as spiritual and ethical signposts with their unique vision, and that the vision of faith cannot be reduced

to an efficient model. When the *Evangelisches Münchenprogramm* (Evangelical Program for Munich) states that its "vision" is to be a "significant church," both "for the life and the faith of all its members," "for the motivation of its staff" and "for the ethical orientation of society," this is a good and clear description of the goal—but not a vision. The lack of a basic distinction between goal and vision weakens the profile of the church.

The Evangelical Program for Munich believes that the church lacks the capability to sell an excellent product. The gospel should be communicated as "the best of all messages for humankind today." They have the courage to communicate the Christian message in the *agora* of our time. But the product is not sharply enough defined because the message is not the *best* of all messages but a *new* message, and that leads to a failure to recognize the new meaning which the vision of faith symbolizes. The church reform debates fall under the dictates of economic reason, in which market efficiency becomes the paramount consideration, and which understands the church to be "in its spiritual substance a service enterprise." The program demands "market-oriented thinking also within the church which will not only lead to more flexible and membership-friendly structures in the church as a social institution but also influence its own content, its message and the way in which it is proclaimed."¹ There is a danger that contextual interpretation loses its substance here. "New" interpretations become "modified" interpretations – ecclesiology is no longer subject to the conditions of late modernity but arises from the conditions of late modernity.

In many Lutheran churches in Europe mission is part of their attempt to find new relevance in society. Mission is revalued and becomes the central goal in a very complex setting. This includes progressive secularization, loss of church mentalities, shrinking church membership, at the same time a boom in new religiosity which corresponds to the individualization of modern piety. The church finds itself in competition with other religious trends and missionary activities. Faced with these developments, the way the church understands itself to be a missionary church has its own, specifically different dynamic in Sweden or in Italy, in France or in Estonia. But they all share the conviction that, in order for their religious marketing to be visible and influential in the market society, their mission must be attractive. From an Italian perspective this means that,

... nowadays it is less a matter of converting people to Lutheranism and seeking a mass influx into our church, than about bringing home the gospel as we understand and live it, and about offering a spiritual home to those who are spiritually homeless. (Hans-Michael Uhl)

¹ Wilhelm Gräb, *Management und geistliche Leistung*. Presentation given at the Theological Forum in Göttingen 4.9.1999, pp. 5 and 14. Unpublished paper.

The gospel is communicated as an invitation to a (new) home in the confusing, late-modern risk society. In this perspective, mission is clearly defined as a reflex action, but none of the European contributions offers a specific concept of mission, clearly different from, for example, *diaconia* or education. It is striking that the significance of Christian education, of the pedagogical work in society – with the exception of Slovakia – is hardly ever mentioned or emphasized. This is worrying because, on the one hand, education is one of the pillars of a Reformation church structure and, on the other, the exclusion of Christianity from the educational institutions in many European countries is seen as the reason for the loss of the Christian spirit (break with tradition!). To subordinate all the specific goals of the church to mission is not very helpful. What is needed is the integration of the different functions of the church, on the basis of the understanding of the church as *communio*.

It is the “Yes to the subject of faith as the central competence of the church” (*Evangelisches Münchenprogramm*) that is crucial for a community of faith. Church is taken seriously again as church when all its activities are understood as arising out of faith, but it is also necessary to explain how faith and communion belong together. The idea of *communio* surfaces when it is said that the communication of the good news in word and deed happens through the experience of communion. But how the experience of communion is theologically qualified is left unexplained. The multi-dimensional concept of *communio* is reduced to one dimension, and its significance is not further explained.

The European churches usually have a weak concept of communion and a strong concept of autonomy. *Communio* is problematic. Faced with the dichotomy of communion and society, the idea of *communio* seems open to romantic or ideological misunderstandings. Such misunderstandings, as well as their high-church version, are the reason for reservations *vis-à-vis* the *communio* idea, as Denmark put it: “the church is not really eager to pursue the concept of *communio*.” (Hans Gammeltoft-Hansen) On the other hand, the ecumenical officer of the Lutheran Church of Hanover was able to stress that “it would be best to implement church reform as a well-considered, balanced reformation of the church in accordance with the ... aspects of *communio*.” (Günther Overlach) A real renewal of the churches in our time does not depend on attractive structures and campaigns alone but on a substantial vision which the church as a responsible community of faith makes clear to the world. A church which celebrates Holy Communion and knows that it is above race, class, or nation, which is witness to the communion between God and humans, and has hope for all people, cannot be mistaken for a national church or an exclusive church. A wide and critical ecumenical concept of communion is required.

Consonant with the lack of a global horizon for reform discussions in the European Lutheran churches, the ecumenical perspective does not really in-

fluence or enliven ecclesial self-understanding. In spite of numerous instances of ecumenical cooperation on the congregational level and between theological professors and church leaders, an understanding of, and often even interest, in the real meaning of ecumenicity is lacking. Ecumenical thinking does not seem to fit into the present ecclesiastical landscape in Europe. The model of an ecumenical church is not (no longer) attractive.

Lutherans in North America: A Church that is for Mission

To make the gospel known in the world, ministry in daily life, accepting the social challenges and being active—those are the goals of the pulsating North American church life which draws attention to itself and in which the members know basically that the liveliness and attractiveness of the congregation depends on them. "Activity in the world" (ELCA Constitution), the faithful are called and sent into the world, and therefore the focus is on mission as the overarching goal. Therefore the congregations are seen as "mission centers" (*cf.* H. George Anderson), and their great social commitment "is integral to the mission of the church." (Joanne Negstad) A missional church asks: "What is God doing and how do we participate faithfully in God's mission?" (see Walter M. Stuhr)

Mission is seen as sharing in God's mission, and because God's gift of salvation is intended for all humans—the comprehensive missionary concept based on the Trinity—no self-centeredly salvific or ethnocentric understanding of mission or of the church can be defended. But here lies an internal problem. The power of the old concept is still inherent in the attempts at overcoming this understanding: "Our problem in reaching out to different racial, immigrant, economic, and social classes is structurally determined by who we are." (James Y.K. Moy) And "we," the American church, is a middle-class, ethnically rooted community of whites in a multicultural society. Only two percent are "people of color," and most of them are also middle class. If one takes seriously what people really want in the church: "a place to grow old with people just like me," "a haven from the chaos of society" (Walter M. Stuhr), one can only very gradually extend and change the views of the middle classes. The perceived elementary needs of the faithful can be neither denied nor despised for the sake of a church whose service is meant for everyday life; but they can be changed. The church has a new message! At this point, however, moderate and radical attempts at church reform clash: missional church against maintenance church; church as a learning community or as alternative life style. "A vision for the sending of the church of North America" whose goal is "a shift in thinking and acting," faces the challenges of "racism, gay or lesbian issues, poverty issues, relief work." (see Walter M. Stuhr)

Monica Melanchthon stresses that, in the different attempts at developing an appropriate understanding of the church, there is an implicit vision which affirms a common life,

a vision which inspires rebuilding and reconstruction of community inclusive of differences and diversities, a vision finally which reaches beyond the future of church and society and embraces God's entire creation.

It is the comprehensive vision of the *communio*. "This vision cannot easily be reconciled with the reality of churches as social bodies." This difficulty contains the real theological and practical challenge which can only be clearly faced if vision and goals are distinguished from each other, action itself is not mistaken for vision, and the church is seen critically as a mirror of society. From a non-American point of view, the strong sense of mission and action-orientation in these reflections are striking.

The diversity of its activities is to make the missionary church conspicuous and attractive to people, but if mission as sharing of God's mission is the goal of the church, its spiritual basis should be more clearly defined. In the words of the Zion Lutheran Church of San Jose:

Balance the emphasis on worship and fellowship with greater emphasis on discipleship (spiritual maturity), evangelism (outreach), and ministry (service)... We are trying, to build a spiritual foundation, to help people build spiritually fit lives. This is what the church can do, that other social institutions cannot. (see Walter M. Stuhr)

This mission oriented theological logic in the church's commitment aims at making the church spiritually recognizable as a social institution. This is offered in the language of the market: "Spiritually Fit in Silicon Valley," people need "spiritual growth" or "In the City of God," "transforming individuals, congregations and communities." (cf. Walter M. Stuhr) Theologians and church leaders are no longer shy or afraid of using "the language, culture, and power of Madison Avenue (advertising)" (John Lynner Peterson), the church single-mindedly sees itself as a player in the market and gains a specific charisma. This becomes clear for instance in the growth of congregations in large cities where members come from far afield because they like the church ("church shopping"). Lutheran congregations with a majority of homosexuals can therefore coexist alongside congregations with a predominantly conservative middle-class membership.

The point of church renewal, which expresses itself in different accents in the balance between worship and discipleship, between spiritual life and socio-ethical action, is not to turn the congregation into a service enterprise—which it simply is in American society!—but to show its service to be God's effective instrument in the world. Explicit religion is part of American piety. However, in view of the reality that many Lutheran congregations across America are still "family churches" (Ronald Duty), "maintenance-driven," and sometimes

more like a country club than a missional church—and thus also service enterprises—the transition to becoming an open, missionary church which accepts plurality in the given communion in Jesus Christ and therefore lives by a vision, is long and slow.

The Lutheran congregations in their variety believe in central structures and, in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America set up in 1987, they gave themselves a common structure which integrates Lutheranism from the different European traditions and represents a new American form of the Lutheran faith. It performs inner-church, social, and ecumenical tasks. Therefore it is not only part of the model of the church “that the church will be representative of the diverse population of the United States,” but also that it “will work effectively with ecumenical partners.” (H. George Anderson) Ecumenism as the “vision of the ELCA” means more than establishing friendly relations between separated churches, more than mutual tolerance. Because the unification of the different Lutheran churches in America is seen as a sign of Christian unity given by the Spirit of God, they confess, “that God is moving us toward greater unity in Jesus Christ.”² “Its goal is full communion, i.e., the full or complete realization of unity with all those churches that confess the Triune God.”³

This view implies a vision of *communio* which, however, does not seem to be sufficiently clarified. How can full communion be the goal if, on the one hand, unity as communion with Jesus Christ has always been given, and, on the other hand, “full” is equated with “complete”? The meetings and discussions in Chicago showed that the ecumenical vision is not much in evidence, and that *communio* as an eschatological vision is never mentioned. They rather found “localism,” “*de facto* congregationalism” in the congregations. They said, in 1995, that what really happens in the common life of the American church is sobering:

thin, and fragile new alliances are taking shape with very little in-depth communication emerging among them. (...) Not only may the distinctive thread of Lutheranism be lost, so too may be the great tradition itself, the *communio* transcending time and space history and the globe.⁴

In the models of church renewal however, which brought a slight feeling of new openings in 1999, not *communio* but mission was the dominant idea.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada has also developed mission as its overarching goal, a “vision for mission” which addresses life at all levels and in which all church members are to be involved. By concentrating on the

² William G. Rusch (ed.), *A Commentary on “Ecumenism: The Vision of the ELCA”* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress 1990), p. 15.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

⁴ Daniel F. Martensen, “Lutheran Identity and Communion in the Ecclesial Context of the United States of America,” in Heinrich Holze (ed.), *The Church as Communion. Lutheran Contributions to Ecclesiology*, LWF Documentation No. 42 (Geneva: LWF, 1997)p. 382.

search for opportunities for mission in an increasingly secularized society, it comes to the insight "that the needs of the world and our opportunities for mission are found on our doorstep and not simply in the distance." (Evangelical Declaration). This implementation of the missionary church in everyday life aims at overcoming the private, consumer-oriented understanding of faith in Canadian society. At the same time, it is an attempt at overcoming the still strong, white, European background. The missionary vision is strong but its implementation is difficult. As a very small church in a very large country it "finds hope and seeks direction and discernment in the shadow of the cross." (Arthur Lechnitz)

Latin American Transitions: Prophecy and Relevance of the Church

In the Latin American churches, visions are important because in unbearable, dehumanizing conditions hope springs from visions. While therefore they are anything but theoretical they will turn into utopias if they reject reality and try to create an entirely new society. A church which builds on such visions must always look ahead, deny the evil present and radically change history. Important are "prophecy and utopia: to know what has to be denied, and where to progress."⁵

Faced with the complex reality of a context that threatens its survival, the Lutheran church in Brazil asks how the congregations can "attract people" (Ministries in Partnership) and state that "it is imperative to find vision for the 21st century." For this Lutheran church of the future, prophecy is important (cf. Pedro Puentes: the church as "voice of prophecy"), but it must be communicated through "contextual realities" among which is the market, and with the Lutheran inheritance to which the message of justification is essential, "the greatest provocation in history." Therefore consistent steps must be taken "towards a Lutheran ecclesiology within the Brazilian reality." (Gottfried Brakemeier) In other words: the ecclesiological model is the prophetic church of the Reformation, relevant in society, which as a minority church has to find its way between Catholicism and the charismatic Pentecostal movement. In this difficult situation of competition relevance is needed, not utopia, and a vision of the Protestant faith which upholds the church and provides impulses—*communio* as lived justification.

The goal is to overcome the exclusive community: *communio* is the inclusive communion of believers. (cf. Pedro Puentes: "inclusive-relational

⁵ Jon Sobrino, "Theologie von den Opfern aus" [Theology from the point of view of the victims] in Carmen Krieg, et al. (eds.), *Theologie auf dem Weg in das dritte Jahrtausend* [Theology in the Third Millennium] (Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser/Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1996), p. 201.

ecclesiology") Its center is worship, because the church's manifold activities "flow from worship and lead back to worship" (Ministries in Partnership), and its essence is the promise of a communion that transcends race, class, or gender. This is an ethical challenge because "community exists with an ethical option." When we form a community we either include or exclude others. God's exclusive - inclusive will seeks to establish a new, inclusive community in the spirit of solidarity. (Pedro Puentes) Where this vision is lacking, the mission of the church will also lose its power. In a nutshell, the Lutheran contributions from Latin America agree that, if everything in the church is related to the vision of *communio* or *koinonia*, the community will appear as the light of the world. *Diaconia* will then not happen without the experienced communion in Jesus Christ, in which the value of every individual is recognized. Without *koinonia*, *diaconia* risks being understood in a narrow way, in which the neighbor becomes an object or is lost in activism. Its strength is the prophecy based in the unconditional communion with Jesus Christ, in justification and *communio*.

Such a perspective can by no means be taken for granted, and demands that the vision be made concrete. "How can we make communion concrete in a world divided according to class, ethnic group, race, and gender?" (Gottfried Brakemeier) The main problem in Brazil is the self-centered, ethnically based, church. "The missionary perspective and the concern with the church's presence in Brazilian society were not a priority." (Ivoni Richter Reimer) By setting itself new priorities on the basis of a change of heart which amounts to a change of mentality, the Lutheran church in Brazil is slowly acquiring a new profile. That new profile is one of missionary engagement; consistent concentration on the message of justification "which constitutes the power to heal society's illnesses" (Gottfried Brakemeier); missionary and social projects; a cooperative understanding of ministry; overcoming of the dominant pastoral and parochial structures of the congregations; and a church as a living, inclusive community "which is more welcoming, has more solidarity." (Ministries in Partnership) It is remarkable how clearly the new understanding of the church as a missionary community in solidarity arises from the understanding of justification. One knows that it needs "good theology" (Pedro Puentes), and sets theological emphases. Among them is the return to the theology of the cross when slogans such as "religion itself seems to operate like business" and the "effectiveness of the church" threaten to become the main criteria. (Manuel Ossa)

Theology has a central function in the development of new ideas in the churches because the churches as they really exist are mirrors of their time and society. They are caught up in the areas of different cultures and political situations, and are challenged to develop their profile in, not against, these realities. Because of this dependence and because of the power of these factors, a convincing development of theological arguments is required, related

to the real situation. Added to this are the failure of the utopian liberation theology and the success of evangelical Protestantism in its Pentecostal form. Else Marie Wiberg Pedersen therefore has called for a thorough and critical theological study of the new church concept, and has drawn attention to the chasm which exists between the still existing reality of white congregations and the theological duty to form an inclusive community. A social commitment of the church towards the outside, in which the poor remain objects, widens this chasm still more. In the words of Israel Peter Mwakyolile: "For the 'people of the garbage,' *koinonia* is not possible." Are the Lutheran churches moving in a new direction, are they really churches in transition, or are these new ideas way beyond the congregations, and beyond reality?

This critical questioning concerns the Lutheran church's ability to break out of its ethnic ghetto. It hits the center of the vision of *communio* and is addressed to all Lutheran churches worldwide. How much do the white Lutheran churches in the United States, for instance, make visible the inclusive community of Christians; to what extent do the middle class churches of Germany or the national churches in Scandinavia, or the churches in Eastern Europe reduce Lutheranism to ethnicity? How can they conduct mission convincingly? Without a clear understanding of the vision of the Christian faith today, which is theologically based on justification and *communio* and becomes concrete in the life and action of the churches, there is a threat of stagnation in the *status quo*, or the loss of the chances of a transition.

In the attempts to be a new, prophetic church in Latin America which does not only speak the language of the country but, in its proclamation, addresses the mentality of the people, the old ethnic ties still prove to be very strong, and that leads to considerable tensions. It is still the ethnic congregations that shape the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Argentina with their anti-Catholic and fundamentalist convictions. They were, and still are, under the influence of foreign missionaries whose aggressive methods are successful. The consequence is a diffuse Lutheran identity. (Lisandro Orlov) Conditions do not permit a critical theological reflection and distort the task of inculturating the gospel. In view of this diffuse character, a clear understanding of the message of justification and of the theology of the cross are as important as the linking of mission and *diaconia* with the concept of *communio*. This would mean that a church with a clear message is open to every person, and would gradually transmit hope. In view of the radical exclusion of people in the new market conditions, and the ruthless violations of the most elementary needs of humankind, the church can become a place of integration and of healing. "Developing the power of communion is one of the main challenges facing the church in Latin America today." (Martin Junge) Part of this process is—and here again there is the call to become a relevant and not a utopian prophetic church—to accompany people through all the phases of their lives, and to be truly pastoral.

Joachim Track emphasized: "The idea of *communio* is only understood if it includes this dimension."

Africa: Holistic Mission and the Unsolved Problem of the Church as *Communio*

The contributions from the Lutheran churches in Africa reflect the diversity of these churches and, at the same time, show a certain common awakening. Since the end of the Cold War, these churches know that they have been sent into society, into the lives of people, and play a remarkable role in the way they deal with, and solve conflicts. They intervene critically in politics and no longer allow themselves to be controlled by governments. The bishops of Tanzania for instance recommend

that, apart from praying and reconciling our society, the church should be involved in conscientization, directing and advising society, the government, political parties and individuals on the execution and implementation of human rights. (The Bagamoyo Statement)

They are concerned with the realization of democracy, both political and economic democracy, and with the eradication of poverty and suffering, injustice, and strife. The Ethiopian church "understands itself as a model for democracy." (Solomon Endashaw) In its social commitment the church is the advocate of a holistic human development.

When trying to understand the theology of the churches it is their understanding of mission which first catches the eye. They have attempted to clarify the concept systematically over against the questionable missionary methods which led to the founding of the Lutheran churches in Africa. How are mission and gospel connected? By stressing the wholeness of mission as consequence of the wholeness of the gospel, and thus rejecting the Western missionaries' individualistic, non-political understanding of the faith, the church bears witness to the significance of the gospel for the whole of human life. In its proclamation the church shares in God's power which enters into communion with humans. Therefore it is the main goal of the church "to participate in God's holistic mission to and among the peoples." (Eric A. Allison) Because the "holistic gospel" addresses people in all the circumstances of their lives, it heals the whole person "spiritually, mentally, physically, and socially." (Leonard Mbilinyi) This presupposes a holistic understanding of life, and theologically it holds that Christology is rooted in the doctrine of creation. In its origins, human life is meant to be life in relation, life and work in community ("Be a person among people." "It is through people that we are people," cf. Owdenburg M. Mdegella), in communion with the dead and the living, with God and nature. This original world view, which implies a strong concept of community, determines the understanding of mission. It serves

the society, and therefore leads to a "missionary vision." (Cuthbert K. Omari) In the struggle against poverty and injustice the church sees itself "as an evangelistic and social activist." (Solomon Endashaw)

The new model of mission with its visionary power replaces the old "rescue mission model" of colonial times. This is a transitory stage in which the old understanding is still effective, as seen in the surviving colonial mentalities. There also are groups which demand "that the primary mission of the church should be only evangelism." (Solomon Endashaw) At the same time, entirely new churches are emerging, some of which become mega-churches with enormous charisma. People leave the mainline churches, and young people especially join the new movements. A new wave of mission is hitting Africa, linked with charismatic fundamentalist Christianity and with the church growth movement.

In a situation such as the one in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT) for instance it is important to differentiate the goals of the church (*cf.* the seven main characteristics of the ELCT's self-understanding), to restructure, and to put more emphasis on better and more careful planning. In cooperation with the state and with partner dioceses in Europe and America the strengthening of the concept of congregation is to be given a firmer basis, but there are still unsolved problems here. The model are the three Cs: class, clinic, and cross, which describe the spiritual, educational and social tasks. To this has to be added the emphasis on the community (another C), and this shows a change in self-understanding. The existing community of the church is not an expression of *communio*. The church exists along tribal lines. Karen L. Bloomquist finds that "Family, tribe and community tend to operate as unquestioned lines of demarcation." According to its bishop, this means "that the question of the ELCT as a communion in itself and in community is still unresolved." In reality there is a chasm between the rich and the poor in the congregation, "true *koinonia*" is still just a desire. "The aspect of sharing is very much spoken of, but there is not much sharing within the church community." (Owdenburg M. Mdegella) The community which really exists between the believers seems to deny the reality of the *communio*. Monica Melancthon thinks that "The African churches are in the midst of growing individualism, enterprise, efficiency, profit, competition, self-interest, domination, power, consumerism." There exists a tendency to be self-serving instead of realizing *communio*. The reality of the church, therefore, can be severely criticized, and Anna Mghwira concludes that "the church's message becomes a false prophecy."

This criticism draws attention to the vision of the true church, the church of God "transcending denominational boundaries, tribes and ethnic groups, clergy and lay, men and women, children and elders." (Anna Mghwira) The Christians are seen to be a new community witnessing to the power of Christ. This witness is important if the church wants to understand its services to be

"to all people regardless of creed, color, gender and political persuasion." (Owdenburg M. Mdegella) But this criticism does nothing to deepen the christological dimension. There is no reflection on God's justifying acts of love, on his promise and forgiveness which would help to come to terms with the problem of a sinful church. The addition of community to the three "Cs" equally appears to be problematic because it becomes a goal, like education, and the function of the guiding vision of *communio* remains unclear, as well as its soteriological and eschatological implications. It should be strongly emphasized that the community given in Jesus Christ carries within itself the promise of a future which is different from the present state of the congregation. People who at present are caught up in their sometimes pitiful humanness, and in the omnipresent egotism, will be freed for a new life in solidarity by this unconditional, hopeful promise (vision of faith, justification and *communio*). This understanding would deepen the sense of faith.

The contribution from Cameroon deals with this sense of faith which the church tends to forget under the pressure to achieve social success.

People need to see the immediate social implications of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon's (ELCC) presence among them. People have become increasingly blind to the significance of the Christian faith in its inner sense as their efforts are oriented towards external results.

The eschatological self-understanding of the church is also hidden beneath its social engagement, so that the church is seen to be an NGO. "Thus one could speak of the 'NGO'-ization' of the mainline churches."⁶ The wonderful gift of *communio* which becomes visible in the church is hardly mentioned. "It is God's miracle that these people of different tribal groups are all together members of the unique Church, the ELCC." The meaning of faith lies in the trust in the spirit of Jesus Christ who gives this new community. Former enemies now respect each other and realize *communio*. Therefore the church sees itself to be "a gift of the Triune God." In it, the gospel is preached to the people as the power of a new situation in Jesus Christ, "they find forgiveness of sins, salvation, and eternal life. The church is the place to go when there is no other place to go to." (Thomas Nyiwé) The spiritual significance of the church derives basically from the trinitarian understanding of the new being in Jesus Christ, which can be uniquely experienced in baptism and Holy Communion. The social understanding of the church therefore lives by the spiritual understanding, just as the spiritual cannot be without the social. A holistic understanding of the church in the world has to spell out appropriately the different implications of the *communio*. All the church's expressions of life must not be seen as individualistic acts, but as coming from the whole of the church, because every expression is communicated to the whole—it is for

⁶ Paul Gifford, "Some Recent Developments in African Christianity," in *African Affairs* 1994, p. 93; pp. 515-534; p. 521.

the whole and in the whole—but every expression also stands by itself, and has to be understood in terms of its specific function.

The Asian Longing for an Inclusive Church

While the Lutheran churches in Asia are minority churches in a huge continent pervaded by religion and social injustice, their modest but important role is beginning to be seen in a new light. The gospel is there for the wounds of people; it gives strength in the daily struggle for survival, both spiritually and materially. It gives new life in the community of the faith in Christ in the midst of this world in which people are condemned to unjust living conditions. It therefore intervenes in this world and takes on social responsibility. In this way the new model of the church communicates an active spirituality which is clearly different from the model of the old missionary churches which led people into isolation. What is given is not hope of "a safe and isolated place" (Kunchala Rajaratnam) but hope for the suffering society. "The church should no longer be just 'a gathered community,' a 'chosen people,' it should be a 'people's movement'." (Ginda P. Harahap) The church expresses its new presence in society in many small and even minute movements. "The church is an alternative community." (Deenabandhu Manchala)

"[T]he people in Asia today are facing a crisis of spirituality that poses a baffling question concerning the meaning of human existence."⁷ By no longer accepting human suffering in all its terrible dimensions, and painting a "sad and indignant"⁸ picture of society one is seeking a different meaning, and wants to appear in a different way. Caring for the people's concrete needs changes the spirit of religion. In the contributions from the Lutheran churches in India, Malaysia, and Indonesia it is particularly clear how the Christian religion is asking for this new meaning, and how the missionary church is understood in a new way: as a "witness of Christ in the midst of society." (Darwin L. Tobing)

"Therefore, the church has the responsibility to reflect on and to satisfy the legitimate needs of the people so that in the process of participation the kingdom of God is restored." (Naomi Hamsa) If the main goal of the church in its witness to Christ is seen to be the realization of the kingdom of God in this world, this witness requires evangelism and social engagement, but the convincing interplay of these two elementary aspects of the goal still remains the problem. "There is a marked imbalance between evangelism and

⁷ Choan-Seng Song, *Third-Eye Theology. Theology in Formation in Asian Settings* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), p. 24.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

social concern." (Naomi Hamsa) Sometimes the priority of the one or the other aspect is emphasized. The discrepancy between them can become very marked, and the preeminence of one aspect can also be seen to be very problematic when, for instance, the church only intervenes in social questions when its own interests are at stake, or when evangelism only happens in order to take people out of their social context. This leads to a very uneven picture of the Lutheran presence in society, vacillating between institutionalized self-interest and dedicated social movement. In the critical reflections with different emphases there is, however, a common longing for a church "that includes every human being" (Gnanabaranam Johnson), for an inclusive church, for a new spirituality so that the community in its living witness will extend "to all humanity." (Kunchala Rajaratnam)

The Indian context is a huge challenge to the vision of *communio*. Does it not ignore the reality of the co-existence of over a billion people who differ in language and region, caste and tribal connection, and are ordered and classified by the caste system in which everybody has his or her function in place? Or, does not the caste system as it really is, oppressing and marginalizing people, require particularly this vision of *communio* in its universal, social sense? If the churches live this vision they are a tiny but important sign in this vast society which seems to be floundering in its contradictions between new laws (since 1950 equality before the law) and old habits and customs (which determine caste membership). But in the churches themselves the traditional Indian social order is still effective because the change of faith does not automatically change the distribution of money, power, and social standing. "Although in the church there should be no difference between upper- and lower-caste Christians, between rich and poor," the bishop explains, "...in reality these differences exist and the church should concentrate on eradicating these differences." (Gnanabaranam Johnson) The struggle against sin makes sense for him because the clarifying and forgiving Word of God not only brings pardon but frees from sinful customs. The prayer "for the success of the gospel work" therefore belongs to a consistent Christian faith which has its living basis in the common meal of Holy Communion. "Although Christians are divided by language, culture, and denomination, the bond that unites them in Christ is stronger and eternal." (Gnanabaranam Johnson) This indicates a general understanding of the idea of *communio* which is very important for the definition of the church's goals in India. And it is made equally clear that indigenous ecclesiology is necessary, as well as a theology of the kingdom of God.

It is problematic that in most Asian contributions the concept of the church is in no way communicated through the context of the concrete social conditions. Instead, radical prophetic criticism of globalization is evident. Guillermo Hansen therefore says

... that what we call globalization is neither paradise nor hell, but more likely a multifaceted process that is not simply imposed from above, or from outside— but is also longed for from below, and from within.

Such differentiated thinking also requires the self-critical acceptance of the reality of the church as it actually exists, which is hierarchically structured and shows traces of “Christian tribalism.” In view of the extent of corruption and self-centeredness, the criticism can be as strong as the longing for an alternative, inclusive church—the church in the “context of brokenness.” (Deenabandhu Manchala) Faced in fact with an exclusive church without a differentiated theological mediating of community and society which understands the Word of God itself to be mediation, this longing can lead to the vision of *communio* becoming a utopia, a spiritual ideal or an hypothesis, and the church as an institution receives nothing but radical criticism.

The goal of the church is to become a communion which has to change the world, so that a true church and a just society may emerge. In this sense, Kunchala Rajaratnam writes that “the church is far from the communion that we long for. Communion is an ideal to realize and worthy to strive for. It is at best an hypothesis.” This is a thorough misunderstanding of the essence of the vision of *communio* and its links with the gospel as a gift: the evangelical understanding of communion. Its liberating power for the understanding of the mediating of community and society is not recognized. Its only significance is seen to lie in its criticism of the exclusive church. There once was a vision of a convincing Lutheran community—“the dream, the vision was there”—but it was unattainable. No sign was set in society. “The factors that divide the church or the community, nation- and worldwide, remain the same: material resources, race, caste and culture.” Where should the road go now? “The church itself is not clear regarding its mission.” (Kunchala Rajaratnam)

The problems lie deeper. The church is not clear about its vision and makes no critical distinction between its goals and the vision underpinning these goals as a vision of faith. It is the non-evangelical understanding of vision which is the basic problem. But this means that the theological point of the understanding of *communio* in its commitment to a just society has simply not been accepted, and that no thought has been given to the meaning of the church’s spirituality in all its depths, which might shed a different light on the theme of the church’s failures. The judgment is clear: a true church does not exist anywhere, and the existing church should only be fought against. The only thing that really exists is a movement of those who have understood the prophetic message of Jesus in its power to create a just society.

This radical thinking changes when one accepts one’s place within the church, and sees the principal goal to be the witness to the presence of Jesus Christ. This presence remains even when people fail dismally, and liberates people for merciful prophecy. It is present in the many social programs and activities. The healing power of Jesus has to be brought into the brokenness of the

world, and this will show the church of Jesus Christ to be a sign and succor for society. In Taiwan for instance it is necessary "to help society discover the true value of life" (Chuang, Tung-Chieh), in Malaysia "to share in concrete and practical terms the healing, renewing and life-giving compassion of Jesus Christ." (Naomi Hamsa) Paramount is the hope in the presence of the kingdom of God which has come with the spirit of Jesus Christ, and contains the vision of the communion of all people. It therefore needs to be linked with society. It has to be added that the ecumenical understanding of the church is interpreted in socio-ethical terms. The longing for an inclusive church in Asia brings an openness for ecumenical thinking and action in all its breadth.

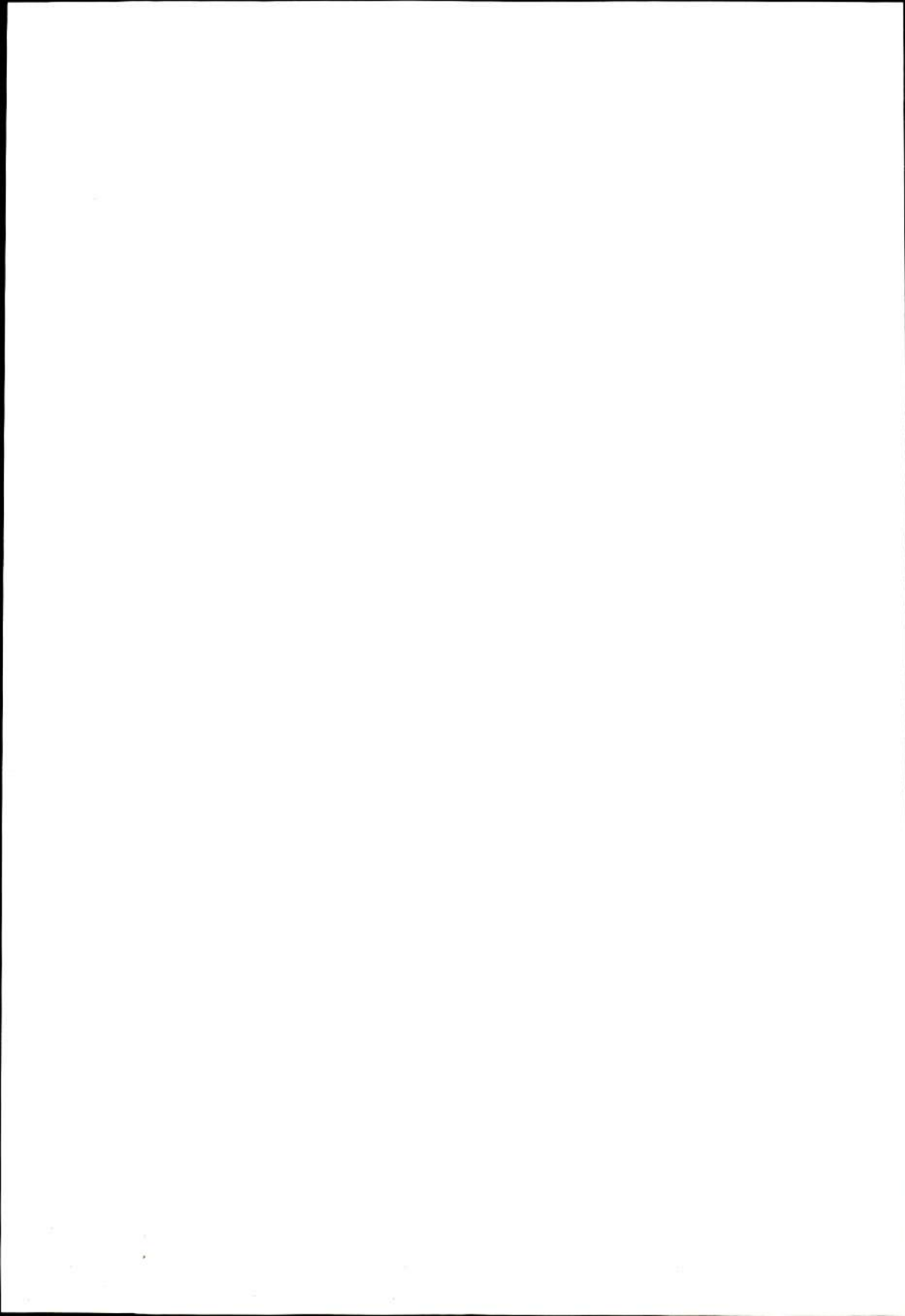
Comprehensiveness and the Undiscovered Multi-Dimensional Vision of Faith

In the different contributions to the ecclesiological project "Communion, Community, Society," which asked explicit questions about the relevance of the church in society, and about the significance of the idea of *communio*, there is a common trend. It is a struggle to find an integrative understanding of the various expressions of life and tasks of the church, but the vision of *communio* is not given its appropriate importance for the understanding and shaping of this integration. The history of the modern understanding of the church in the world, with its emphasis on the tensions between evangelistic and social commitment, between worship and faith in the world, is a continuing chain reaction of theological efforts which apparently is to be replaced today by the struggle to find the integrative, holistic understanding. Just as mission and *diaconia* are not just two of the various aspects of the church but essentially inform the whole of the church's life, so the emphasis now is placed on the church in its totality which is visible in a multiplicity of functions. It remains unclear, however, how these functions become a comprehensive whole. What is lacking is a strong, structured vision.

There is little understanding and explanation of the binding vision of faith that underpins the different goals. In some contributions such as in those of Latin America the substantial significance of this vision is touched upon, but for the majority it is just a theme among others which is interpreted in a one-sided manner, misunderstood, or is lacking completely. The multi-dimensional nature of *communio* and its consequent significance for a structured understanding of the comprehensiveness of the church's acting is not developed, instead mission is generally seen as the main goal. The lack of a deeper theological and comprehensive understanding of communion however increases the main tensions in the church, in their struggle to define their identity in society, especially between ethnicity and universality, evangelism and social engagement, and leads to certain fallacies. On the one hand, the church's

sense of communion can be reduced to ethnicity, and nationality; on the other, mission and *diaconia* are understood without the vision of *communio*. Therefore, the talk of comprehensiveness is mostly no more than a statement or perhaps an appeal.

The question of, and the longing for, an inclusive church, for true community and a new being shows a search for the vision of faith. It can be said that the communion of the faithful transcends the natural, ethnic, and social structures, but the whole extent of this vision and its systematic significance are not fully appreciated. In view of the chasm between the vision and the reality of the church, the gospel content of the vision remains curiously faint, and little thought is given to its communication in society and culture. The comprehensive relevance of the idea of *communio* lies in the insight that it also has to be a concrete, cultural project. In the transformation processes which the world is experiencing today on a global level, cultural resources are particularly necessary to achieve social peace and permanence in the coexistence of people and nature. Do the churches understand their role as critical cultural resource, and their consequent importance for education? This is open to doubt. The changes in society which are glaringly obvious in politics and in the economy also transform all the deep dimensions of mentalities, of values and visions, and here there are limits to society's resilience under stress. Therefore it is important to ask what ideas and visions are inspiring the great actors of today, and what are their interests. What are the vision and interest of the church? If the church is not visible on the market it loses its identity and relevance. The concept of mission requires urgent clarification. The lack of the vision of *communio* in the understanding of the church as a missionary church, of mission as the overarching goal, is a considerable drawback. The churches have still to discover the idea of *communio* in its full, multi-dimensional sense.



Appendices

Questions for Theological and Social Analysis¹ ("Contextual Mediation")

How does the church understand itself in your society ?

What are the distinctive characteristics of your church ? How do society and the church's members view the church ? What are the tensions between its official self-understanding and how it actually operates (between the church's theory and practice)? What are the different ecclesiologies in your church and region ? How important is the idea of communion in its understanding and life ? What are the main issues under discussion in and about your church?

What are the main social issues, conflicts and dynamics in your context?

How is your church dealing with and responding to them?

What are some examples of how your church is engaging in these challenges? What are the strengths and weaknesses? Suggest further courses of action.

How is your church collaborating with other denominations and other religious and secular organizations and movements in addressing social issues in your region. What the strengths and weaknesses in this collaboration? Suggest additional models.

How is your church addressing the global dimension of these social issues? How does it act jointly with other churches of the Lutheran communion? How might a deeper appreciation of the implications of communion challenge and inspire new ways of working together? In what ways can churches in this communion hold one another accountable for their decisions and actions?

¹ These questions were formulated by the core group in 1997 prior to the first regional meeting.

Questions for Theological Reflection ("Theological Mediation")

Map out the theological understanding of a Lutheran ecclesiology on the basis of the analysis presented (compare it with other theological models).

Analyze the theoretical presuppositions underlying the assessment, evaluation and suggestions.

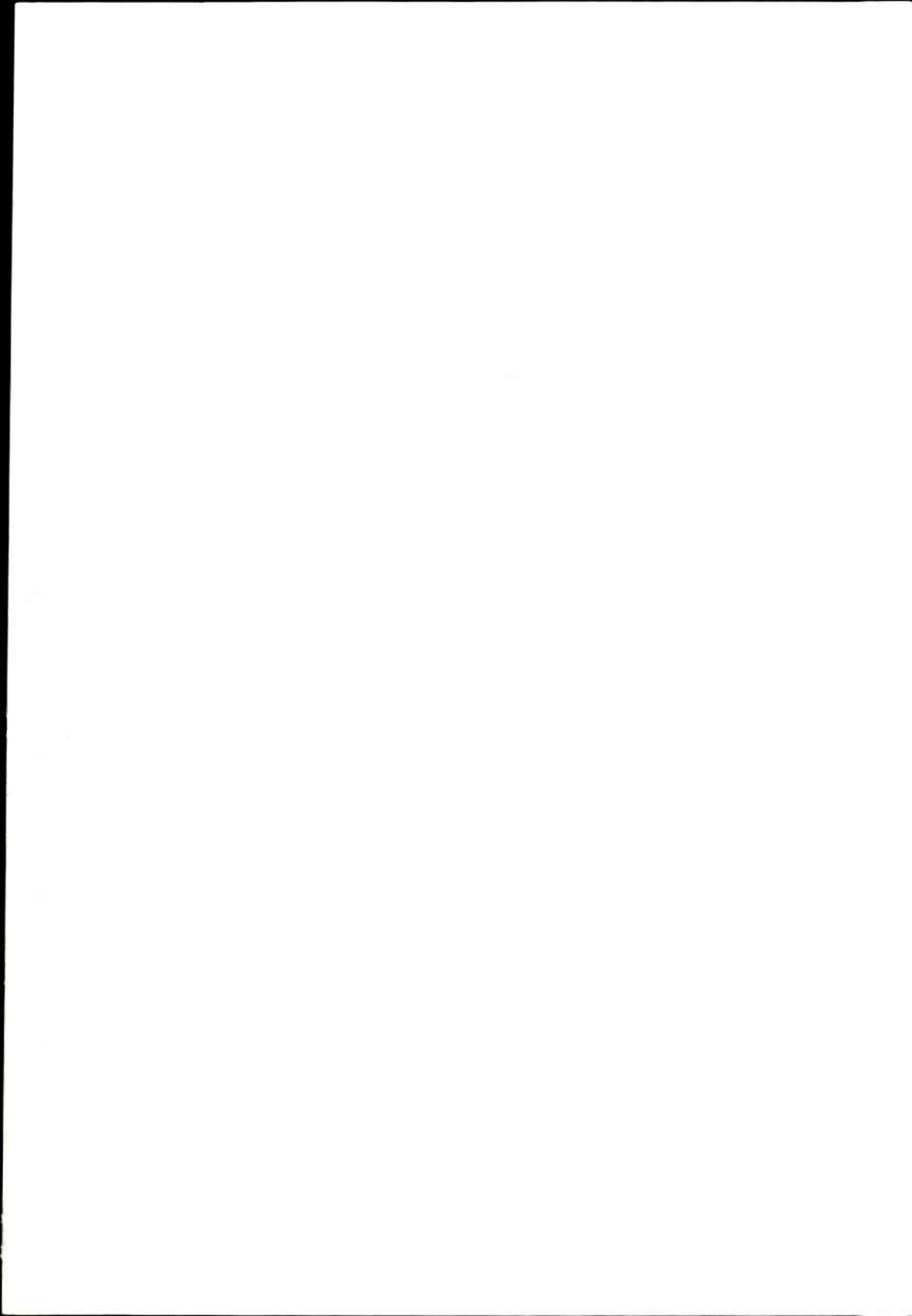
What would be the impact on the church's structure and theology if your suggestions were to be implemented?

Ten Theses on the Role of Theology in the LWF¹

1. The life of the LWF is grounded in the hearing of the gospel. The message of justification has a normative and critical function because it focuses the whole doctrine and practice of the church on the center, Jesus Christ. This is expressed in the Lutheran communion by the experience of the liberating Word of God which makes us ready to confess Jesus Christ and Savior in all dimensions of life.
2. Theology in the LWF is as good as the quality of the participation and of the engagement of all its staff and representatives in the life of the communion.
3. All Christians are theologians: in all they do and say there are underlying theological convictions. Theology proper, however, is to make manifest, by critical and committed reflection, the shared insights and convictions of God's activity in the world.
4. Theology manifests itself in various ways, in different contextual expressions and also in different modes of discourse. All these different forms have their value and integrity insofar as they are related to and respect one another.
5. This relationship is grounded in the sharing of a common biblical heritage read in the light of the insights of the Lutheran Reformation and in the diversity with which it is expressed and framed in different times and places. In this diversity, in which the living Word of God expresses itself in concrete ways, we recognize our common Christian identity in its Lutheran affirmation.
6. In the history of the LWF as a communion of diverse churches, the awareness of the tension between the gospel that holds us together, and the diversity with which we express it, grew as a creative challenge for both the self-understanding of the LWF as a communion and its theological practice.
7. This challenge offers new opportunities for the exercise of theology in the LWF through which the communion will be promoted if, and only if, these characteristics of a theological practice are followed : a) the LWF offers itself as a place for different articulations of diverse experiences; b) as a catalyst for innovation within theologies in different contexts; and

¹ Formulated by the Program Committee for Theology and Studies at its meeting in 1995. Proceedings, LWF Program Committee for Theology and Studies, Exhibit 3, pp. 2-3.

- c) as a guarantor of both the diversity and of the necessity of expressing commonalities.
8. Thus theology serves the church by promoting God's mission as well as in discerning and evaluating how the mission is being carried out by the church.
 9. The importance given to theology in the LWF has direct consequences for how the still broken communion becomes an expression of the promised *koinonia*. The LWF's commitment toward this idea and practice of theology is, therefore, the measure of the effectiveness by which the LWF is the expression of the communion.
 10. The responsibility for this commitment lies within the Council, its Program Committees, and the staff.



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